

RIDINGDALE FLOWER SHOW



REV. DAVID BEARNE, S. J.



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RIDINGDALE FLOWER SHOW

BY

REV. DAVID BEARNE, S.J.

ILLUSTRATED BY T. BAINES

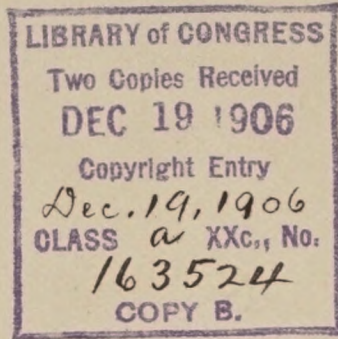


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I am a chronicler of little things—
Comings and goings, children's words and ways,
Chance guests, new hosts, and single happy days,
And household legends. These have been the springs
Of much of my best knowledge: I have striven
To make my . . . world a glass
Where shapes and shadows, like a breath, might pass,
Dimly reflecting motions out of Heaven.

Faber.

RIDINGDALE FLOWER SHOW

RIDINGDALE FLOWER SHOW.

I.

For a man who had long ago retired from business, William Lethers' life was a busy one. But it was a very regular one. So regular was it that supposing Lance or one of his brothers wished to see William *particularly* — and there were times when William, and William only, could give them the help or the tool they sought — they had only to recall the exact time o' day to know just exactly in what duty Mr. Lethers was engaged.



Needless to say, after spending many long years in hard work that would not permit him to hear Mass except on Sundays, once he retired into private life William joyfully availed himself

of the privilege of the Daily Sacrifice. His hobbies were gardening and the care of pigs. Be quite sure that the entire length of a fairly spacious kitchen-garden lay between Mrs. Lethers' speckless domicile and the piggeries: otherwise that lady would have cheerfully sacrificed the delights of ham and bacon-curing, the rendering of seam, the distribution of fries, and the making of pork-pies.

That the pigs should be kept thus remote was the only condition upon which Mrs. Lethers would allow her husband to buy and rear and feed and fatten them, and though William found the walk between his back door and the pigsties a rather long one, particularly in wintry weather, he was not at all anxious that the distance should be diminished. Besides, Tommie was now approaching the helpful age, and there were tasks connected with the piggery and the pigs that were accepted by him as a sort of right. Only once had Tommie forgotten to change the special pair of clogs set aside (in an outhouse) for his use in the sties: one piece of forgetfulness of this sort was enough — for Tommie.

Whenever the weather was good, be it summer or winter, William spent by far the greater part of the day in his garden. Neighbours used to remark that "Billy grewed about iverything a body could mention;" and certainly, if we except asparagus, there was very little in the fruit and vegetable line of which he could not produce excellent specimens. Even Toxon, the market gardener, had to admit this. Tommie never lacked friends among his school-

fellows; but in July and August, to say nothing of September and October, the number of boys who "chummed up to him" became embarrassingly large. However, Tommie had a grandmother equal to the task of interviewing and scattering an entire regiment of interlopers; a grandmother who was superior in worth and affection to a whole army of mere apple-lovers.

In spite of William's failure to grow satisfactory asparagus, his garden remained to him a source of constant pleasure and not a little profit. He had no separate orchard, but the dwarf apple-trees planted from end to end of the really big plot of ground quite justified the boast of the man who sold them, and added much to the beauty of what was essentially a kitchen-garden. At the Ridingdale Flower Show, if William did not carry off half a dozen prizes it was only because, in past years, he had been such a frequent prize-winner that he now sent in his specimens of potatoes, peas, beans, and onions — William was very strong in onions — labelled "Not for competition."

I think it must have been the day when Tommie Lethers announced to a group of admiring, but somewhat envious, lads his possession of a young pig — his very own, mind you! — that he was accused by one of the young Kikertons of "thinking himself everybody." Now Tommie had his faults — so his grandmother said, and she was a truthful woman — but swagger was scarcely one of them. Yet it had been charged against him more than once by Dicky Kikerton, and on very small provocation. At the age of

thirteen or so, how can one fail to be pleased with the present of a real live pig, however young it may be? And is it reasonable to hide the fact of such a benefaction from one's companions?

The truth was that Tommie had more than once excited the jealousy of his friend Dicky: more than once had Richard Kikerton's eldest son accused William Lethers' grandson of "thinking himself everybody." The accusation hurt Tommie, and if it had not been for the joy of owning a living, squeaking, grubbing pig, he would have been sad at heart. For he and Dicky had always been chums — saving for the brief periods necessary for the healing of slight tiffs — much, let it be said, to the advantage of Master Kikerton.

Whether it was that Dicky's disposition was naturally an envious one, or whether it was the reiterated boast of his mother that she had once been housemaid to the Duchess of Margate, I cannot be sure. Perhaps among all the boys at the Catholic elementary school, Tommie was the most well-to-do, and therefore the most liable to be an object of envy. For his grandparents were in no sense of the word poor, and, if they had chosen to be foolish, might very well have ranked themselves among the class known in Ridingdale as "bettermost sort o' folks."

So, among other things, Tommie's clothes were always very neat and clean, and his clogs were as well-polished and well-fitting as those of the Squire's boys. Moreover, Tommie had the knack not only of making himself tidy, but of

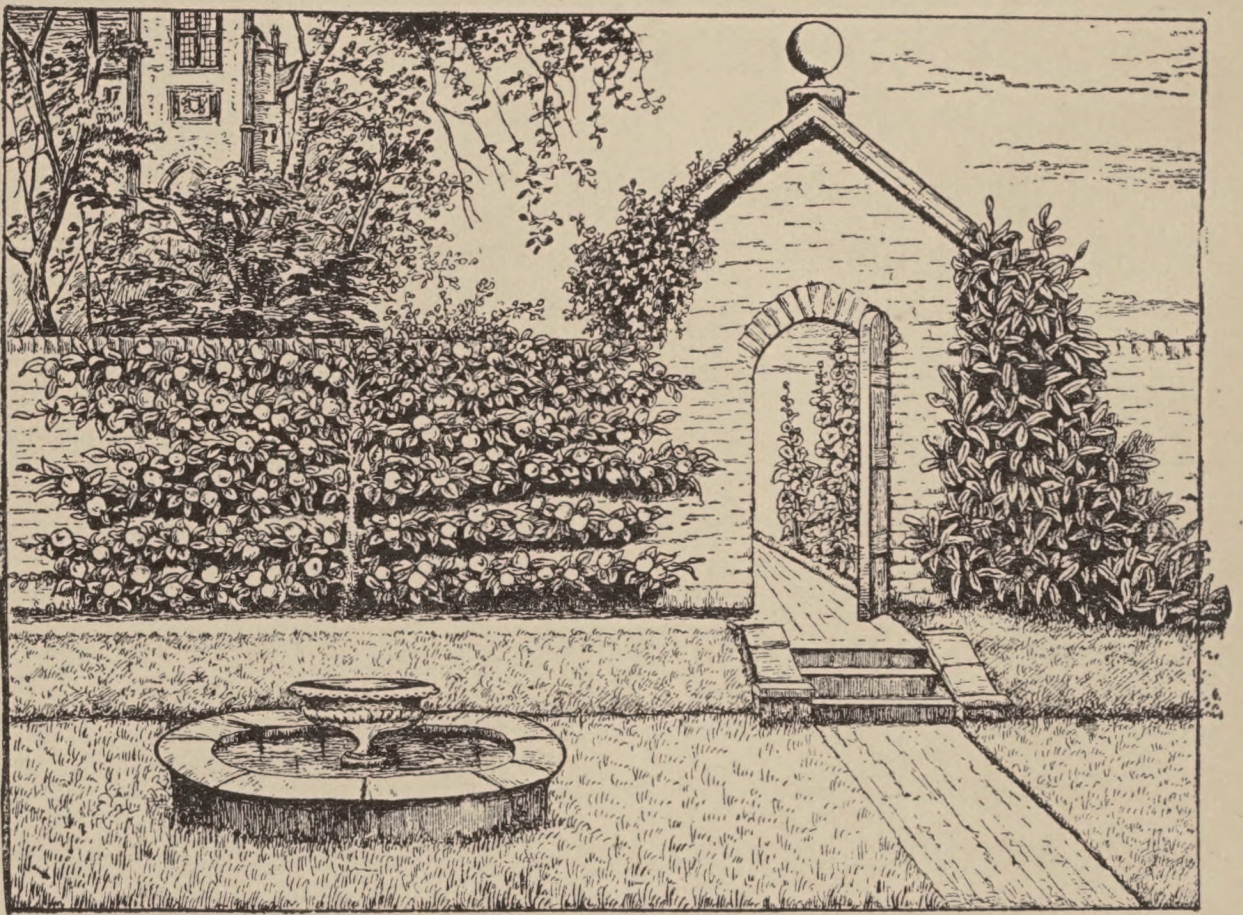
keeping so: to the Kikertons this was one of the unknown arts.

But it was the notice taken of Tommie by Lance Ridingdale and his brothers that occasionally filled the Kikerton breast with envy. Of course Tommie was a singer, and a good one; but that (I suppose they thought) did not justify him in giving himself airs: though if we are not to expect airs from a vocalist — however, let us be serious. Doubtless, it was trying when, on a holiday for example, Dicky called for Tommie and found Master Lance and his brothers in possession of the whole Lethers' establishment, from the pigsties and rabbit-hutches to William's upstairs workshop and Mrs. Lethers' parlour and piano. It is not nice to have your calculations and anticipations all upset, even though you may have reckoned without your host. At the same time, it really does take two people to make an engagement of any kind.

It was the day of the Ridingdale Flower Show and a general holiday. Now on most holidays Tommie was available for cricket or similar purposes and generally played with the Kikertons and other schoolmates. Dicky knew that by ten o'clock Tommie would have finished most of the odd jobs which on such days he always did for his grandmother, and, since the Flower Show did not open to the public until two o'clock, a long morning at the wicket seemed the most reasonable thing in the world.

What then was Dicky's chagrin when on calling for Tommie he found him possessed by the Squire's boys who

were in William's shop hunting with great perseverance for the inevitable bit of something, "not too thick or too thin, or too anything," which was the pressing need of the moment. For George and Lance were putting the finishing touches to one of those models of landscape gardening for which the Ridingdale Show was famous, and over which George and the rest racked their ingenuity annually.



The model for the present year was on a bigger and more daring scale than usual, and included not only a pretty landscape in oils, painted by George, but a terrace garden of real flowers in the Italian style, and a playing-fountain of unique design and delicate workmanship. That it would get a prize was beyond doubt, for though to many specta-

tors these models were the chief attraction of the Show, it never happened that more than three specimens were sent in, and there were always three prizes, first, second, and third. George's model was already at the Show, but in its transit from the Hall to Joyce's close, the foundations of the "marble" fountain had become loosened, and he and Lance immediately made a rush to William's shop for tools and materials.

"I reckon t' young gentlemen'll want Tommie, this morning," Mrs. Lethers announced to the disappointed Dicky Kikerton: "I heard one of 'em ask him to go back t' 'all with 'em when they've finished at t' Show. Nay, it's a no use your 'anging about," she continued as Dicky and his six or eight friends showed no disposition to go away: "Tommie's got to finish his pigs and get me some plums afore he can go anywhere."

On wet days, or when severe weather made gardening impossible, William sat in the room he called his shop, and cheerfully took up little jobs of clog-making or mending. It pleased him to keep in touch with his old trade, and, though there was now no question of money-making, he liked to prove to his friends that his hand had not lost its cunning, and that he could still turn out a neatly-made and well-fitting clog. Moreover, now and then he loved to be able to "find" a pair which by some seeming accident "happened to be" just the very fit for somebody or other whose immediate need of them was apparent. For, in the doing of charitable actions, William was the most artful

dodger I have ever known. Simple and straightforward as a child, and ordinarily quite incapable of anything approaching finesse, when he wanted to do anybody a kindness his subtlety, or diplomacy, or whatever you choose to call it, was amazing.

In the matter of mending, at any rate of re-ironing, under his grandfather's tuition Tommie was becoming expert. For some time past he had been able to fettle his own foot-gear, and nothing gave him more satisfaction than to get the opportunity of exercising his skill upon the clogs of Lance and his brothers. Naturally, however, they were somewhat unwilling to take advantage of his good-nature, though they were always pleased enough to learn, either from him or his grandfather, how to do things for themselves.

So it came to pass that William's workshop became a favourite haunt of the boys at the Hall, particularly on wet holiday afternoons, or when their operations in Arts and Crafts were suspended for want of a necessary tool or the inevitable bit of material. For this upstairs room was a sort of curiosity-shop as well as a working place, and its contents were bewilderingly various. Both William and his wife had a weakness for sales by auction, though their bidding was cautious and their discrimination keen.

"I do believe, William," said Lance on the morning of the Flower Show, "that if I looked in here every day I should find something I'd never seen before."

"Very like, sir," chuckled William as he turned over

a box of scraps to find the exact atom of leather George needed. "We've got a bit o' iverything, like — except brass."

"But you've got loads of brass here, William," protested Lance pointing to an old fender, an assortment of door-nobs — "always *handy*," was one of William's jokes — various specimens of hardware, and a heap of brass toe-caps and clog-latchets.

"A dunna mean that sort o' brass," laughed William.

"Oh, I see; you mean money. Of course you don't keep that here. We all know you're not a miser, William."

"A good deal more like a spendthrift," Mrs. Lethers said as she entered the room and overheard Lance's last sentence. "An' he'll make Tommie as bad as 'isself."

"'Ark at her!" exclaimed William looking quite pleased at the charge. "Ax her, Master Lance, who'd gie t' shawl off her back if a poor body wanted it."

"Mind thee own business!" she retorted, diving into a scrap bag that hung behind the door. "I'm thinking, Master George, what you want'll be here. There's some bits o' soft leather i' this bag."

"The very thing," said George, as she displayed the scraps. "Thank you so much. This is just what we want. Now if Tommie will give me a nail or two — not a hob-nail, Tommie — we shall get on."

Apropos of nails, the boys had a little joke against their friend Tommie, who was rather given to making experi-

ments in the art of clog-making, for he could now do much more than mend or re-iron. Harry had once jokingly suggested that clog-irons should be made in the shape of letters of the alphabet, so that every wearer might carry his initials on his soles. Lance said that, joking apart, it was not always easy to find your own pair out of a heap, and if you wrote your name on the sole the letters were soon rubbed out, while to write it upon the leather inside was not at all easy. Tommie made various experiments with bits of iron, but none of them was quite satisfactory. However, one day he got a brilliant idea.

“Look here, Master Lance,” said Tommie, taking up a pair of his own clogs. “With some good hobnails you can shape any letter you like. I did this T and L all by myself. Only you’ve got to mind, sir, and have a good thick sole or you’ll split the wood: that’s the worst of it. This is my heaviest pair what I use for cleaning pigsties: they’re that thick they’ll stand anything.”

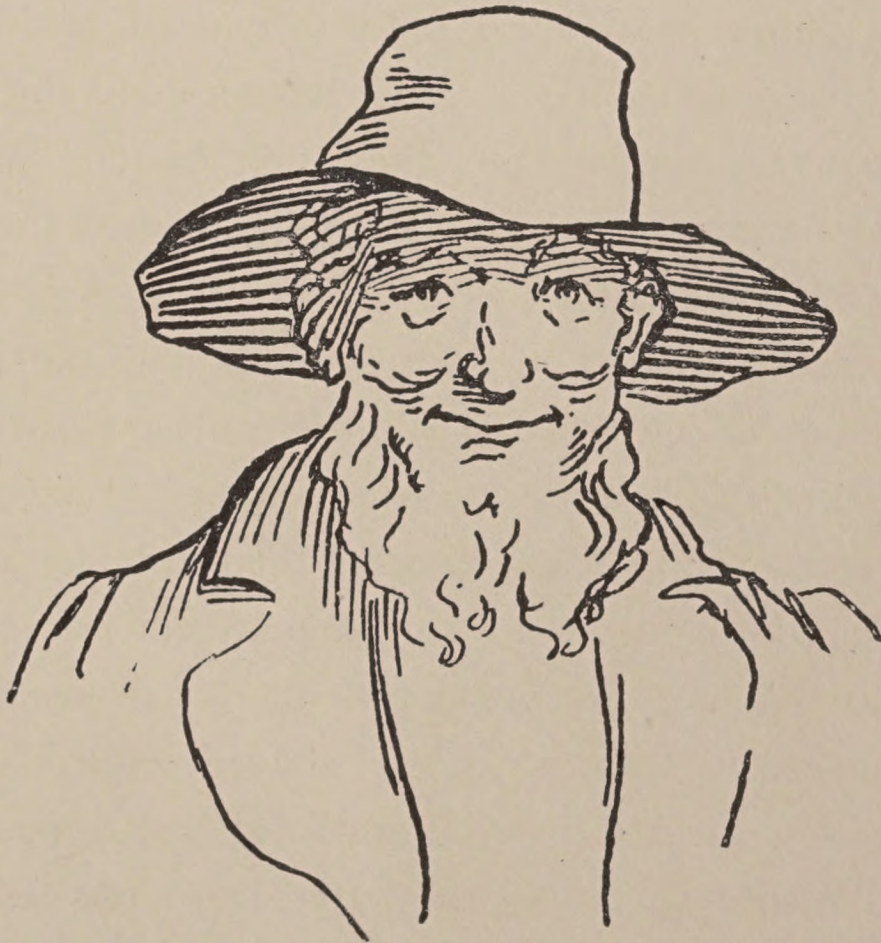
Lance was much taken with the idea, and quite scorned Tommie’s objection that the addition of a quantity of hobnails to the double irons with which his (Lance’s) clogs were already weighted would make them too heavy. However, when he came to try the experiment he found that owing to the position of the two sets of irons there was really not room to form a well-shaped letter, so that he reluctantly consented to wait until he had a new pair of clogs. Meanwhile he *cut* the letter L on one sole, and R

on the other. And thereby hangs a tale — much too long to tell here and now.

“If Tommie can help us this afternoon we shall be so much obliged,” said George to Mrs. Lethers as he was leaving the shop. “The fountain will want looking after and we don’t quite like to be on view near our own work — all the time.”

Both Mrs. Lethers and her husband gave their delighted assent. After dinner, they said, Tommie would have nothing to do except to be at the Show.

“Come straight to us then at two o’clock,” said George to the grinning Tommie, “and we’ll show you how the thing works.”





RIDINGDALE FLOWER SHOW.

II.

WHAT out-door *fête* is pleasanter than an exhibition of flowers and fruit? Certainly the Ridingdale Show was a delight. The day was superbly fine, and from early afternoon until sunset crowds of happy people streamed through the four great marquees. The Volunteer band played admirable music. The tents were full of colour and perfume, and it was not easy to say whether the roses and lilies and carnations gave more pleasure to sight and smell than the raspberries and strawberries and plums. At any rate, when Harry Ridingdale was reminded by his brothers that it was time to go home for tea, his reply was that he had got the very *pick o' teas*. However, when George reminded him that the carnations he was looking at were not *picotees* he said that he would at once join the homeward movement.

The boys were in high feather, for they had won the first prize for the "Design in Landscape Gardening," and were already considering the application of the two guineas. So great was the crowd round their model that George had had some difficulty in getting at it to manipulate the fountain — which they soon decided to leave altogether in the proud charge of Tommie Lethers. Modesty kept them from wishing to exhibit themselves along with their handiwork, for the admiration of the spectators was as loud as it was sincere.

So from two o'clock in the afternoon the delighted Tommie mounted guard over what he certainly looked upon as a masterpiece of beauty and skill, and took no little pleasure in turning the fountain on and off at stated intervals, and doing whatever was needful for its replenishing, as well as for the refreshing of the flowers.

William's not-for-competition onions and peas were, as usual, highly commended, both by the judges and the spectators, and Colonel Ruggerson's peaches and nectarines came in for nearly as much admiration as a plate of gigantic gooseberries exhibited by the market-gardener Toxon.

At a little after eight o'clock that same evening, Tommie Lethers was returning home from the Flower Show, feeling very pleased with himself, the Show, and the world generally.

William and his wife were already at home, and while Tommie ran gaily up the lane, whistling a tune that he

had just heard played by the band, and thinking what a delightful day he had had — just as he came to the gate of Toxon's garden he heard a gruff voice suddenly exclaim, "Ha! here he is!"

"Yes," said Toxon himself, stepping out of the shadow of a big tree, and seizing Tommie by the arm, "we've been a-waitin' for you, my lad."

"What do you want?" asked the astonished Tommie, trying to free himself from the man's grasp.

"I want a good ash-plant," said Toxon grimly: "so do you, for that matter. And you'll get it. Here, Jim," he said to his assistant, "where's that stick?"

"You let me go," cried Tommie struggling in the man's strong grasp.

"Ay," chuckled Toxon, "I'll let thee go, lad, when thou'st had thee welting. I'll learn thee to steal my plums: I will *that*."

"Plums!" exclaimed the indignant Tommie: "I've never seen your plums."

"P'raps not," chuckled the market-gardener: "dessay you shut your eyes while you took 'em."

"I've never been in your garden once in my life," said Tommie, resisting the man's effort to drag him along.

The statement was literally true, for though William Lethers and Toxon always spoke when they met they had no dealings of any kind with one another. In a small way they were rivals, for on more than one occasion William had surpassed Toxon in the exhibited articles of peas

and potatoes; but the market-gardener was a Dissenter of the rabid and aggressive type, and his language concerning Catholics — particularly if they were not customers — was bitter and abusive.

“A thief’s generally a liar,” said Toxon, giving the ash-plant a swish in the air to test its suppleness, “and we know very well that a Papist is both at once. Let’s show him his own footmarks, Jim, and see what he’s got to say to ’em.”

Firmly held and dragged along by two strong men, Tommie was soon brought to the foot of a rifled plum-tree. There to his horror and surprise he saw plentiful impressions of his own initials clearly stamped all over the soft soil. The sight stupefied him.

“I reckon them’s your clogs right enough, eh?” asked the gardener triumphantly. “Not much doubt about that there T.L., is there now?”

Tommie tried to speak, but could not. Not only were these marks a perfect reproduction of the nails he had driven into his clog-soles, but he doubted if there was another boy in all the Dale whose clogs were similarly adorned. If he had been a sleep-walker he would have concluded that he had done the deed unconsciously: but Tommie was not a somnambulist. And the out-house in which this particular pair of clogs was kept was, or ought to have been, locked.

“Is them your footmarks, or is they not?” roared Toxon. Half-mechanically Tommie looked from the footprints to

the clogs he was that moment wearing. The gardener laughed satirically.

“O we know you’ve changed ’em all right since you was here i’ the afternoon,” said Toxon. “You Romans is pretty clever always: only sometimes you arn’t clever enough.”

“I never took — *one* of ’em!” Tommie managed to gasp.

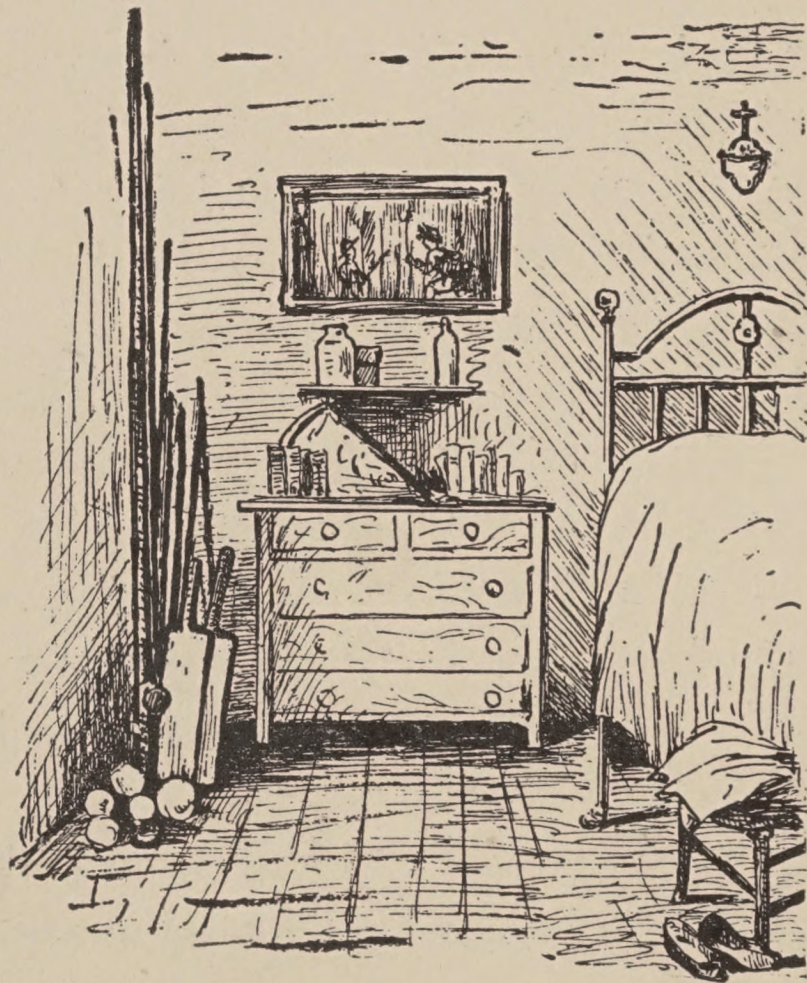
“No lad, you’re reet there,” laughed the gardener: “I reckon you took about a hundred and fifty.”

“I never *touched* one of your plums!” the boy cried out as Toxon told him to take his jacket off.

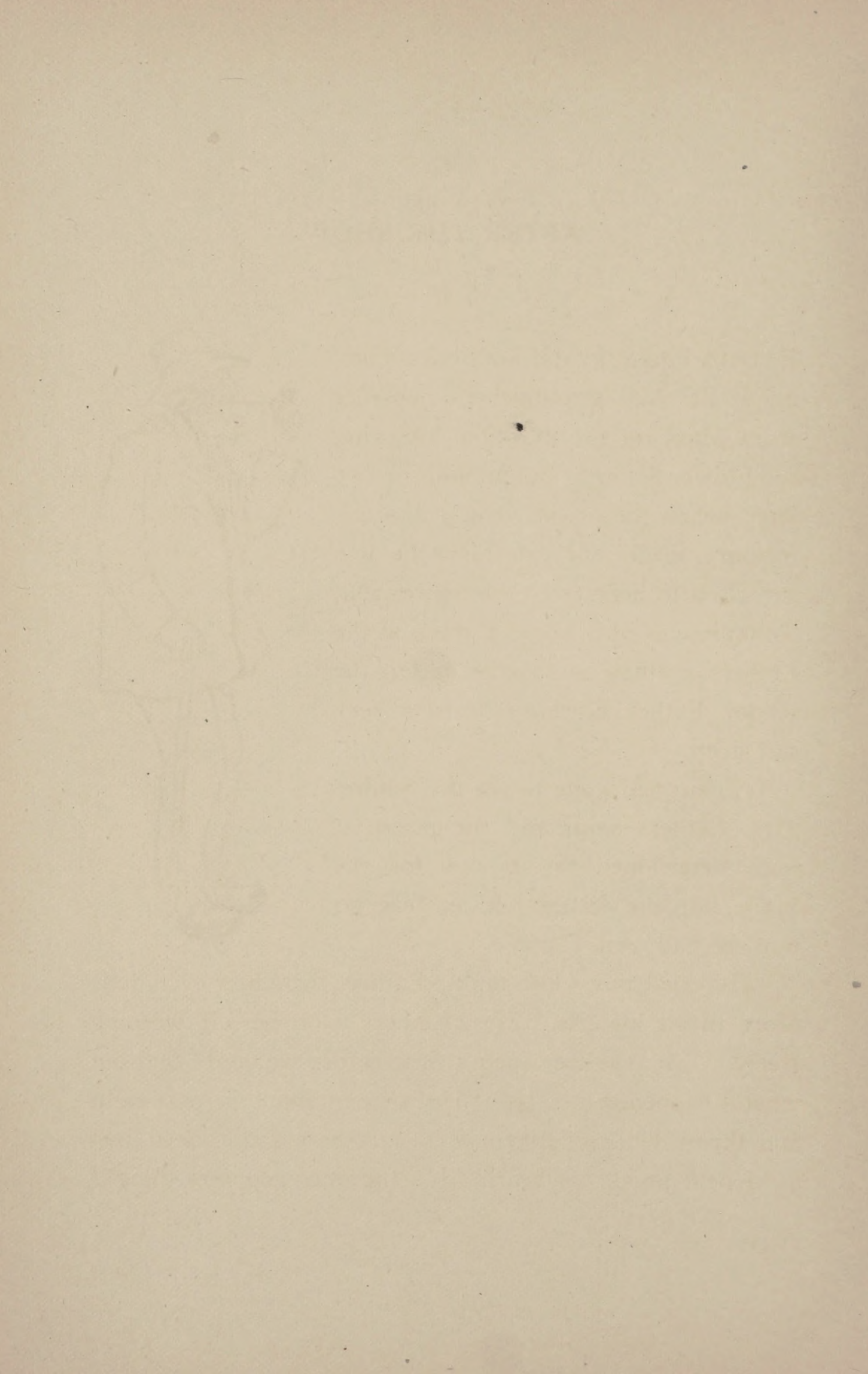
“Knocked ’em down wi’ a stick, most like,” the man answered dryly, “and got a mate to pick ’em up. Eh, but you Roman Catholics are deep uns.”

“But I’m sure and *certain* ——” Tommie was beginning when, at a nod from his master, the assistant took hold of the boy and after stripping him of jacket and waistcoat stretched him out on a bench close by.

It is enough to say that even if Tommie had stolen the plums the flogging would have been much too severe.



AFTER THE SHOW



AFTER THE SHOW.

I.

FATHER HORBURY did not notice Tommie's or his grandfather's absence from Mass on the morning following the Flower Show. But an hour or two later, when the priest went to the elementary school for catechism, he was surprised to hear from the master that Tommie was ill in bed. Calling at the Lethers' cottage as soon as he left the school, Father Horbury heard a very sad story.

William had gone to see the Squire, Mrs. Lethers said, and the priest at once determined to set out for the Hall; but she would not let him go until he had seen Tommie.

"He cried more last night, Father, than he's ever done afore in all his life," Mrs. Lethers said, herself weeping freely. "It was iver such a time before we could find out what'd happened to t' lad. He come in about 'ar-past eight and throw'd hissself down on t' sofa here and sobbed just as if he'd break his heart. It's the outrageousest thing I



iver heerd on since I was born into this world. But if there's law to be got we'll have it on that villain Toxon."

Much shocked and distressed, Father Horbury did his best to comfort and soothe both Tommie and his grandmother. He saw at once that a robbery had been committed by somebody, that the somebody had borrowed Tommie's clogs, and that the somebody must have been acquainted with the Lethers' back premises. The priest greatly feared that the thief might turn out to be a Catholic school-boy.

Very anxious about this, and grieved at the sight of Tommie, who, as Mrs. Lethers truly said, was one mass of weals and bruises, Father Horbury set out for the Hall with a heavy heart. He knew that, for many reasons, anything like law proceedings between William and Toxon would be very unfortunate. The Ridingle Dale Dissenters had lately shown themselves very bitter against the Catholics, chiefly on the subject of education, and anything that tended to bring the Catholic elementary school into discredit would give the enemy untold satisfaction. If William prosecuted Toxon, the gardener would be certain to try to find out the real thief and set the law in motion on his own account. Within the memory of any one living, only one Catholic boy, and he a stranger, had ever appeared before the Ridingle Dale magistrates, and the priest was naturally anxious that such a fair record should not be broken.

It is not always the big events of life that give the greatest amount of trouble. The commission of some mortal sin, for example, does not always involve the unhappiness and disturbance occasioned by an act which may only amount to a venial sin. Without deciding the exact degree of sinfulness in the present case, it is certain that for several days after the Ridingdale Flower Show Father Horbury and others spent a very troubled and anxious time.

For a good twenty-four hours William and his wife were obdurate. They listened to everything Father Horbury urged, but they wanted to have the law on Toxon, they said, and the law they were determined to have. Then scarcely had the priest persuaded them not to take out the summons than Colonel Ruggerson unwittingly upset Father Horbury's plan by telling William that "if that whining hypocrite Toxon was brought up before him [the Colonel] he'd give him three months without the option of a fine." Father Horbury had then to tackle the Colonel, and to begin with William and his wife all over again.

During the same period, Father Horbury and the schoolmaster were cautiously trying to discover the actual stealer, or stealers, of the fruit; more particularly they wanted to find out the borrower of Tommie's clogs. They both knew that what is called school-boy honour is sometimes very like the "honour" that obtains among thieves, and that it will not bear a strain of any kind.

"We could soon do it by questioning them separately

and privately," the schoolmaster suggested. But this was just what, for good reasons, Father Horbury did not want to do.

"Got any suspicions?" asked the Colonel when the priest talked it over with him.

"Not very strong ones. Of course there is always a boy one thinks of in connection with such things; but one might be hideously wrong."

"Take my advice, Father, and question him. If he hasn't done it he probably knows who has. Lads of that class give one another away like anything. The poor always do, you know."

"Well, it is about all they have to give away," said the priest drily. "But as old public school-boys, you and I know very well that such 'giving away' is not confined to the poor."

The Colonel snorted. He had no reply, because only a week or two before he had related to the priest a shameful instance of tale-telling of which he, the Colonel himself, had been the victim as a boy.

Though both the priest and the schoolmaster were determined to find out the culprit, they were particularly anxious that Toxon should not do so. The hasty man had already taken his revenge upon Tommie who, though of course he had been an unwilling victim, had really borne the punishment of another. Moreover, that punishment had greatly exceeded the offence, for one of Toxon's men declared that "if before the theft there was thirty plums left on that there

tree he'd eat it, roots and all. He had all but stripped it himself the morning of the Show."

Meanwhile, Tommie was kept at home, though after the first day he did not remain in bed. The schoolmaster called at the Lethers' frequently. He had therefore no need of the information, but each day he was careful to ask all the boys of Tommie's age if they knew how he was getting on. Tommie was a general favourite, and every fourth and fifth standard boy gave a report of their friend's condition — all except Dicky Kikerton and Jim Walker. This in itself was a little surprising, because the master knew that these two lads were among Tommie's playmates: he also noticed that Dicky and Jim seemed just now to be inseparable. Both of them kept the Lethers' house at a distance.

Meanwhile, two people were trying, and succeeding better than they knew, in frightening Mr. Toxon. The priest avoided him, but the Squire took every opportunity of advising him to offer an apology to William and his wife, and to make some compensation. Dr. Nuttlebig declared he would force him to do both.

"Remember," said the doctor with much emphasis, "if the case ever comes into court I shall be called to give evidence. And I won't spare you. For, mind you, I can say on oath that I never before saw a boy so brutally handled. Besides," added the doctor, "you know very well that you have got no defence. You couldn't have thought that the lad would be such an idiot as to rob your garden in a pair of clogs that betrayed him wherever he set his

foot. Fact is, Toxon, there was a good deal of spite and malice on your side of the business. People are beginning to say very ugly things about you, and I don't wonder at it."

Toxon blustered a good deal on this occasion, and declared that he had acted within his rights and was ready to take the consequences: in his heart, however, he was thoroughly alarmed. His wife was still more alarmed. She had sons of her own.

This woman was a mother, think of that;
A name which carries mercy in its sound,
A pitiful meek title one can trust.

In some respects she knew her husband better than he knew himself. Like him, she was a Dissenter: unlike him, she believed that some Catholics were very good people. She respected both William Lethers and his wife, and but for Toxon would have been friendly with them. Like the God-fearing woman she really was, she betook herself to prayer. It is quite certain that as soon as their first shock of anger and indignation had passed, Mrs. Lethers and her husband did the same. They may be forgiven perhaps if at first their feelings towards Toxon were extremely bitter. It is easy enough to forgive when the offence is slight, and when the matter merely affects one's self: when it involves a grievous injury to one who is very dear to us, as well as to ourselves, the difficulty of forgiveness is greatly increased. Tommie was the apple of the old people's eye. That he should be accused of stealing fruit was

in their mind an outrage; but that the accusation should have been promptly followed up by an unmerciful flogging seemed to them at first just one of those deadly injuries that they could not, and that God would not expect them to, forgive. They were not long in finding out, and admitting, that they were wrong.

But when Mrs. Toxon called upon them and mingled her tears with those of Mrs. Lethers, even if Satan had appeared to them as a barrister-at-law, promising to conduct their case free of cost, I know they would not have consented to the prosecution of Toxon. For though the wife had come without her husband's knowledge, she came well knowing that in his heart he sorely repented of his rashness and cruelty, and was not a little afraid of possible consequences.

Next day, Toxon himself spoke to William. Perhaps the apology was a little wanting in fulness and humility, but it was an apology. The gardener seemed anxious to argue as to the amount of compensation, but William cut him short.

"It's not your money I'm wanting," said Lethers: "what I want is a proof that you're in t' wrong. Gie me what you've amind."

Toxon offered five pounds: Lethers accepted it and promptly handed it to Father Horbury — for the church. And the way Toxon got to hear that he had contributed unwittingly and unwillingly to the support of Catholicism was curious.

Full of sympathy for Tommie, the Squire's boys had come to carry him off to the Hall and, as they said, to make him their playmate for the week, hoping that they might help him to forget his recent trouble. Naturally, they were delighted to hear of Toxon's apology and compensation — though they thought the latter somewhat inadequate. It was Tommie who told them what his grandfather had done with the money.

"Well now, Tommie, that's just spiffing!" said Lance. "'Pon my word, you know, I think I'd take a licking from Toxon if I could earn five pounds by it for Father Horbury."

Tommie admitted that there was some comfort in looking at the matter from that point of view.

"But," continued Lance as they passed Toxon's garden, "I'd give anything to see Toxon's face when he hears that his five-pound note has gone to support what he calls Popery."

Lance often forgot that his high clear voice had great carrying power. Every syllable he had spoken was heard by Toxon who was working on the other side of the hedge. But I am not at all sure that Lance would have cared to see Toxon's face at that moment, or to have heard his remarks.

"I've often enough seen gaffer in a nasty temper," remarked one of the gardener's men that night, "but niver nowt like what he wor in to-day."



II.

My readers may remember that on the morning of the Flower Show day Dicky Kikerton, Jim Walker, and some others had called at the Lethers' to ask Tommie to play cricket with them. Mrs. Lethers had explained that her grandson was engaged to help the Squire's boys: she also mentioned the fact that Tommie had to pick some plums. Perhaps it was a pity she mentioned plums. There were times when Dicky Kikerton was admitted to the privacy of William's garden, and allowed to help Tommie in the picking of fruit. Such moments were delightfully sweet and juicy ones to Dicky, for Mrs. Lethers was generous and laid no embargo upon eating. "I'd as soon think o' put-

tin' a muzzle on a lad as send him to pick fruit and tell him he munna eat none," she used to say.

It was bad enough of course that Dicky should be deprived — not so much of Tommie, though he was a desirable player, as of Tommie's bat and ball and stumps.

"Why didn't you ax her to lend 'em us?" asked Jim Walker to Dicky as the group skirted William's garden and tried to catch sight of Tommie.

"Axed her afore," said Dicky sulkily, "and she wouldna. We can only get 'em when Tommie's playin'."

"They're a stuck-up lot, them Lether's," remarked Jim Walker as they strolled on, but suddenly pulled up near Toxon's garden.

"They are that," agreed Dicky. "Think 'emselves everybody, just becos ——"

"My eye, wouldn't I like some o' them plums!" exclaimed Jim, pointing to a particularly tempting tree laden with ripe Victorias. Even grown-ups used to stop to admire Toxon's produce. The group stood for some time in silence, feasting hungry eyes upon the ruddy ripe fruit — each plum, as they knew, just a gay-coloured little skin full of delicious juice.

"Come on!" said Jim Walker at length, somewhat savagely. "You've got a ball, Dick, and I've got an old bat. Let's make some stumps."

It was a good suggestion, and if it had been acted upon immediately all would have been well. But an ugly little demon called Discontent had taken a firm grip of Dicky

Kikerton and, instead of shaking him off, the lad encouraged him to remain. Almost any vile thing may be looked for from the man or boy who invites the spirit of Discontent to lodge within him.

"Look here," said Dicky to Sam Wilson, "you and t'others go and get Jim's bat, and call at ar 'ouse for my ball. Jim and me'll mek some stumps and pitch 'em."

After a little "argifyng" the lads ran off, leaving Dicky and Jim standing looking over Toxon's hedge.

"Want to talk to you," began Dicky as he watched his companions out of sight.

"I know what you're goin' to say," said the astute Jim.

"Toxon and all his chaps and iverybody 'll be at t' Show this afternoon. Won't be a body about just here 's afternoon."

"'Ow d'ye know?"

"Why, 'course there won't. Everybody 'll be at t' Show, and folks what isn't 'll be lookin' at t'other folks what's goin'."

Tangled as the statement was, Jim admitted that there was something in it.

"Get into a fine owd 'obble if you're copped," added the not over-scrupulous but cautious Jim. "Toxon's a caution."

"Who's to cop us?" demanded Dicky.

"One o' t' bobbies might be about."

"Likely!" said Dicky with scorn. "They've *got* to be at t' Show all the time: you know that."

Jim was pretending not to be very keen about the proposed raid upon Toxon's plums: but he was only pretending.

"How many on us is in't?" he inquired.

"On'y me and you. I wanna let on to a soul."

"Hum," said Jim, looking thoughtfully at the sole of one of his clogs. "We mun mind about footmarks. Them plums is in t' middle o' t' garden, and you've got to tread on ground what's dug. One o' my irons is broke," he continued, looking at the other clog. "I might get lagged through that."

Jim had read detective literature to some purpose: so had Dicky.

"Both o' my clog-irons is loose," said the latter. "I can easy take 'em off this afternoon, and put 'em on again when we've got the swag."

"What time?" asked Jim.

"Three o'clock's best. Some on 'em might come back for tea; and they mightn't go out agin all neit."

"Right!" said Jim, with a wink. Their companions were in the distance with bat and ball, and the conspirators had not yet cut sticks for the wicket.

For the remainder of the morning they played cricket.

Dicky had calculated matters very well. By three o'clock in the afternoon the neighbourhood of Toxon's was quite deserted.

There were several ways of getting into the garden

without passing through, or round by the back of, the house, and the two thieves elected to approach it by the meadow that skirted William Lethers' pigsties. It may have been the sight of the pigs that gave Dicky his base and treacherous idea of putting on Tommie Leathers' clogs.

More than once he had been present when Tommie was cleaning out the sties, and Dicky had not failed to notice that when his friend had finished he always went to an out-house not far from the kitchen door and changed the clogs he had been wearing for another pair. If only the door of that out-house had been left open, thought Dicky, what easier than to borrow Tommie's clogs?

Very cautiously and not without a fear that, after all, some member of the family might not have gone to the Show, the two lads crept up to the out-house and tried the door. It ought to have been locked, but it was not.

Poor Tommie! He had himself shown Dicky Kikerton the two symmetrical initials that he had formed with nails. He had laughed heartily too when his grandfather told him that he was evidently determined to make his mark in the world. Only a very innocent boy would have ventured to advertise his movements so plainly.

"This is luck!" whispered Dicky to Jim. "You keep a good look-out! Bother! I canna get 'em on!"

They were a rather tight fit for Jim Walker, but after a time he got them on and at once made hasty tracks for the market-gardener's plums.

III.



It was the boys' confession day and, to the surprise of every youngster who presented himself at Father Horbury's box, a strange priest was sitting therein. They knew of course that once or twice a year Father Horbury always exchanged pulpit and confessional with some brother priest, but

as a rule notice of the fact was given a week beforehand. This time he had not hinted at his approaching absence.

How heartily the poor sinner thanks God for such a means of pardon and grace as is the Sacrament of Penance! It would be hard to say by what class of the faithful this huge privilege is most appreciated; it is certain that the young do not value it the least. The schoolmaster used to declare that confession mornings were quite unlike any other times, and that in some cases the grace of God seemed to make itself almost visible upon the faces of his pupils. This morning his eyes involuntarily wandered to Dicky Kikerton and Jim Walker.

From the beginning of Schools it had been clear to the master that both these lads looked uneasy and disturbed.

Now and again he noticed that one made signals to the other. Once or twice he thought Kikerton was encouraging the other to do or say something. However, the mid-morning break arrived, and the entire school passed into the playground.

But before the master could join them, Kikerton and Walker returned to the school-room and asked if they could speak to him — “private.”

They had a tale to tell, and they found the telling of it somewhat hard — or would have done so if the master had not anticipated most of its details. He did not make light of the theft, but he made much more of their treacherous act towards their friend and school-fellow.

“This they seemed most sensible of, I am glad to say,” the master afterwards told Father Horbury. “Both of them had had a terrible week, they said, and I can well believe it. They looked as if they hadn’t slept for several nights. Of course the fear of prison was in their minds, but at the same time, Father, they were, both of them, as sorry as two boys could well be. In fact, after a time I began to pity them, and to wonder if they had not been sufficiently punished. However, I told them that they had earned a very sound flogging at the least, and I asked them if they would take it from Mr. Toxon, or Mr. Lethers, or from the police. This brought on a storm of weeping and imploring such as I have rarely witnessed in boys. I suggested that perhaps they preferred to be punished by me, and — well, Father, it was the first time that I ever saw

lads look grateful at the prospect of a thrashing. Their eagerness and anxiety to be dealt with at once would have been almost amusing if they had looked less haggard and troubled.

“I at once gave them a moderately severe birching, and when at the end of it I assured them that nobody except your Reverence would hear anything about the matter from me, though I knew they were in pain, they looked almost happy. They said that they wanted you to know all about it, and would I please tell you before they went to confession. They did not know you were away.”

“Bravo!” exclaimed Father Horbury: “that’s just as it should be: that sounds very hopeful. They sinned and suffered, poor chaps; but they have confessed and done penance, I hope?”

“O they went to confession all right, Father.”

“And they certainly did penance.”

“Yes,” smiled the schoolmaster. “But I wish, Father, you could have seen them when they came to me in the morning, and have seen them again as they were leaving the church after confession. Even externally, they were entirely different beings.”

“Well,” said the priest thoughtfully, “I hope that now at any rate, some of our difficulties are over. From something I have heard, I’m afraid Mr. and Mrs. Lethers have their suspicions — at any rate of Dicky Kikerton. I hope it won’t lead to another ruction between the two families.”

“The only person who knows the facts, besides ourselves,

and the two lads, is Dicky's father. He seems to have asked questions, and his son owned up."

"Quite right."

"He was much distressed, and I rather think he gave Dicky a second flogging. Kikerton of course won't speak of the matter. And I fancy Toxon has quite given up making inquiries. I'm so glad, Father, the holidays are close at hand: Tommie won't be obliged to meet either Walker or young Kikerton for a week or two."

"You are right," said Father Horbury. "Tommie is going to the seaside with his grandfather and grandmother."

"Better still," remarked the schoolmaster.

Perhaps no boy was ever more thoroughly ashamed of himself than Dicky Kikerton. Among his school-fellows, his "scarceness" became a proverb. Report had it that of an evening he was not allowed to come out. Somebody had called for him and found him buried in a book. This was sufficiently astonishing, for Dicky had not hitherto been bookish. But in this world good is always arising out of evil, and the schoolmaster is reported to have said that a considerable amount of good sprang from that ugly and treacherous piece of business on the day of the Riddingdale Flower Show.

MISS RATTLE

MISS RATTLE.

RIDINGDALE had, of course, its due meed of spinster ladies. Very useful members of the Catholic community they were too, and Father Horbury thanked God for giving him so many zealous and self-denying helpers in his somewhat unwieldy parish. For these good, unselfish women were unwearied in their attendance upon the aged, the invalided, and the sick; giving time and thought and, as far as their sometimes limited means would admit, the material help which is occasionally easier to command than either leisure or sympathy.



There are spinsters and spinsters, just as there are wives and wives. As time goes on, we English people manage to get a little politer, a trifle more civilized, perhaps, and even our comic literature is, happily, much less *occupied* than it used to be in laughing at old maids and mothers-in-law. We are beginning to understand that exceptional individuals do not represent a class, or even a majority;

that many of the noblest characters among us are found in the ranks of mothers-in-law and unmarried ladies.

I am not saying that every old maid in Ridingle was a model of *all* the virtues. Some of them had an exceedingly imperfect control of the tongue; some of them had a bowing acquaintance — nothing more I trust — with envy, jealousy, and various forms of uncharitableness. They were all trying to serve God: some succeeded better than others. This may be said of more people than the Ridingle spinsters.

Some of them were very careful in the matter of evil-speaking. One of them had excellent reason to be careful, for she had had a very narrow escape of appearing as defendant in an action for criminal libel: she knew that it was only through the real charity and forbearance of the plaintiff that she was saved from the dock. It was a lesson she never forgot.

But there were one or two who, while very chary indeed of speaking ill of their neighbors, were always eager, if not delighted, listeners to the ill-speaking of others. They were receivers, rather than thieves, of their acquaintance's characters. Not of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Mrs. Dominic, the wife of old Dominic the milk-seller, was certainly not one of these. She was above all things a good and kindly soul, but, unlike her husband (who approached sanctity as nearly as any man you would meet in the entire Dale) she was given to Sadness — apparently for its own sake. Now we all know that people who make

a friend of Sadness are sure to be visited by that monster's sons and daughters — whose very names are so ugly that I won't even write them down in this place. Moreover, through no fault of her own, poor thing, she was uneducated — could not read a line. Such people deserve our sympathy and consideration. Gossip is almost the only form of recreation they can enjoy. They are cut off from an entire world of delightful pleasure, and almost compelled to think of and speak about what they see with the eye and hear with the ear.

Mrs. Dominic was undoubtedly the champion knitter of the Dale. She was never wholly idle. When she was not scouring and scrubbing and cleaning and looking after her little dairy, she was just knitting. She was an authority on knitting. She gave lessons in knitting. It had been said of her that she could make a pair of boy's stockings while her competitors were "turning the heel." I don't pretend to know what this means: I am quoting old Kitty, a great friend of hers, and an absolutely truthful woman. Mrs. Dominic bought the best Blarney-fingering by the pound; I know this because I have been in Miss Rippell's shop when Mrs. Dominic asked for this wool — or is it worsted? I learnt that a pound of Blarney-fingering is equal to sixteen skeins of four-ply fingering: what either of these may be I, as a mere man, have no notion. The point is that the stockings made by Dominic's wife were worth the buying and the wearing.

So said Mrs. Ridingdale, and as the mother of eleven

boys and three girls her testimony may be accepted. So said the boys and girls themselves — as many of them, that is, as were out of the nursery and capable of an opinion upon such a matter; and as they were the wearers, very hard wearers too, of these stockings their witness is of value. For when you are shod with wood and iron you need a stocking to correspond in some measure with the strength of your foot-gear.

Being by immemorial appointment stocking-knitter to the family at Riddingdale Hall, during the greater part of the year Mrs. Dominic was kept fairly occupied. In summer she made the thick winter articles: in the winter she prepared the lighter kind for summer wear. In these circumstances, outside customers had to take their chance. The good woman would not undertake what she could not accomplish, and she would allow nothing to interfere with her regular work for the Riddingdales. For, needless to say, she was devoted to the Squire and all that belonged to him and both she and her husband spoke of him in the way that Gottlieb and Ursula spoke of Prince Henry.

Now there was a spinster lady in Riddingdale who was known as Miss Rattle. Her real name was something quite different, but if I ever heard it I have forgotten it. I have been told that if you referred to her by any other title people did not know of whom you were speaking. At the same time, I don't suppose that the most daring person ever ventured to address the lady to her face as Miss

Rattle: but then, you never had to address her. She always took the initiative — and kept it: she addressed you, and went on doing it. When Miss Rattle was in the neighbourhood she undertook whatever talking was necessary.

How she did it is inexplicable, but she managed to call upon most of the Catholics in Ridingle — some said once a week. Upon Mrs. Dominic she called much oftener. For the old Irishwoman was a very meek soul, and a very courteous one, and though Miss Rattle was often a sore trial, the good stocking-knitter sat and listened — and suffered.

I could never hear that Miss Rattle had anything to say that was worth hearing; indeed, for talking about nothing at immense length she might have taken a prize. Unhappily this was not the worst of it. Though she was an Englishwoman of some education, she invariably talked about persons. On the part of a kindly and discreet talker, this may sometimes be harmless enough: it is never without its dangers. Miss Rattle had excellent reasons for knowing this. One or two houses were entirely closed to her.

Miss Rattle was of course a person with grievances: there never was an idle, gossiping woman in this world who was not. One of these grievances was that Father Horbury would not call upon her. She knew the reason why, but she did not speak of it. Father Horbury was always kind enough, but, when necessary, he could speak very plainly.

“The next time I call, madam,” he said to her on one occasion, “you must not expect me to sit and listen to detraction.”

Unfortunately, the next time his Reverence called she was fuller of scandal than ever. Father Horbury left her somewhat abruptly, and, until she fell ill, never entered her house again.

There was a certain wariness in Miss Rattle — some would call it low cunning. She studied her listeners. To talk of certain people in certain houses was unsafe: experience had taught her that. The reason of her being conducted to the door by Mr. and Mrs. Lethers and forbidden ever to darken it again, was a remark she had let fall concerning Father Horbury.

But poor old Mrs. Dominic was such a quiet body that with her Miss Rattle always felt peculiarly safe: in other words, she let herself go. It may be doubted if Mrs. Dominic took the trouble to listen, for there is a passive kind of hearing which is not listening.

Only — one day the old Irishwoman did listen: Miss Rattle was at her best: which means her worst. Her theme was the Ridingdales — a dangerous subject if she had only reflected. But, then, if people like Miss Rattle reflected they would speedily mend their ways.

It was some time before Mrs. Dominic saw the exact drift of Miss Rattle's innuendos. All Lance's friends — that is, nearly everybody in the parish — had heard of his visit to Miss Bessie, the poor old lady who was known to

many as the Witch. I have already told the story at some length, and need only say here that Lance had found Jack Barson too frightened to deliver his master's grocery-basket at the eccentric old lady's house; that when Barson said "it was all very well to say she wasn't a witch when you hadn't got to go to her," Lance promptly seized the basket and not only delivered it but went inside the house and engaged in a long chat with the poor old lady. Also, finding that somebody had killed Miss Bessie's cat, Lance promised to get leave to take her another one, and of course he did not forget his promise. His first visit had been a consolation to her, and to himself something of an adventure; for he admitted to his mother, and to her only, that he had been really afraid of the so-called Witch. He had very little spare time, but at the end of his second visit Miss Bessie pleaded so hard with him to come again that he and George received permission to call every other week or so. Then a wonderful thing happened. The front door of Miss Bessie's house, locked and double-bolted for perhaps forty years, was opened to receive them, and a fire was lighted in the best parlour!

All this news was common property in Ridingle, and everybody rejoiced and said that Master Lance had such a way with him that he could even make mad people more or less sane. Everybody was pleased — except Miss Rattle.

She had her grievance against Mrs. Ridingle. Like

most other people who hated scandal and detraction, the Squire's wife had ceased to visit Miss Rattle.

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"Artful isn't the word for it," Miss Rattle was saying to Dominic's wife. "We know of course that Squire Ridingdale is as poor as Job, but he needn't be artful. The idea of letting those lads get round that old witch of a Miss Bessie! No doubt he thinks she's rich, and it's certain the old woman has got money stowed away somewhere. But just think of the artfulness of it all! I always did say that Master Lance was the most impudent lad that ever walked."

Miss Rattle ought to have seen the light flash in her listener's eyes, but the gossip was too much occupied with her own speech. Moreover, having already said more than she had intended, she was getting reckless.

"People are making a great mystery over that robbery of Toxon's plums," she went on, "but it's no mystery to *me*. The Hall boys are as thick as anything with the Lethers's, and you may be sure that *if* Tommie himself didn't steal the fruit he knows very well who did. He was with Lance Ridingdale and his brothers that Flower Show afternoon, for I saw them together with my very own eyes, and who's to know if one of them didn't slip away from the Show ——"

"Now may the Lord forgive ye your wickedness! Oh ye bowld bad woman!"

The knitting had fallen on the floor and Mrs. Dominic stood upright blazing with wrath.

“Eh, sure if it’s not yeself that is the bad lying wicked thaive o’ th’ characters o’ th’ Blissed Mother’s own children and the saintliest father and mother ye’ll find outside owld Ireland!”

But this was only the exordium to a harangue the like of which Miss Rattle had never listened to before. True eloquence had the good old Celtic woman, meek and sad-eyed as she always seemed to be. She took the floor and kept it. It may be said that she also kept the door, for she placed herself between it and Miss Rattle’s chair. Without a pause Mrs. Dominic denounced the calumnies she had so unwillingly listened to; without a pause she poured a steady flood of invective upon the head of her now thoroughly frightened visitor. Higher and higher rose Mrs. Dominic’s voice, so high indeed that she was quite unconscious of a sudden heavy downpour of rain, quite oblivious of the fact that somebody was knocking again and again at her outer door.

Suddenly she stopped. Somebody had entered the room. Turning round hastily, Mrs. Dominic saw the Squire!

Miss Rattle screamed.

“Pray pardon me,” began the Squire removing his dripping hat. “Mrs. Ridingdale asked me to call for her here. I suppose she is detained in town by the rain. But I won’t intrude upon you just now,” he added, making a bow to Miss Rattle.

“Now the Lord be praised! yer honour has been led here by the angels that never leave ye. Sure, sor, you’ve come

under my roof at the very right moment to tear the lies from the throat o' this false, foul-mouthed, wicked woman! Now, madam!" tragically exclaimed the old lady, "say to the face o' this noble and honourable gentleman what ye said to meself just now behind his back! Say it, ivery wor-r-rd!"

But Miss Rattle had fainted. The Squire thought so, at any rate, and suggested water. Mrs. Dominic brought water — lots of it! Miss Rattle got more water than she cared for. She told somebody afterwards that never until that afternoon had she known the meaning of the saying — "Between the devil and the deep sea."

She did not wait for the coming of Mrs. Ridingle. Deluged with water, Miss Rattle made a rush for the door, and passed out into more water — in the shape of pouring rain.

All might have been well perhaps if the Rattle could have held her tongue: whether she could or not, it is certain that she did not. Greatly humiliated, she of course considered herself much injured, and sought for consolation by giving to a bosom friend, under promise of everlasting secrecy, her version of what had happened at Dominic's cottage. The bosom friend being a bird of the same feather as Miss Rattle, at once proceeded to confide the story to an entire circle of bosom friends as a secret of the first order. Long before the fall of the autumn night that secret was common property. It had reached even the Rid-

ingdale errand-lads. The fact accounts for what happened after dark outside Miss Rattle's cottage.

Like Shakespeare's famous weaver, she had "a reasonable good ear in music:" unlike him, she had not said, "Let us have the tongs and the bones." She had them, all the same, together with a variety of instruments never to be seen or heard in any properly-constructed band. Perhaps no lady was ever serenaded with rougher music. The minstrels were young and strong, and they made a noise as though they loved it. With the exception of one or two boys of the elementary school — Dicky Kikerton and Jim Walker being prominent — they were all working lads. Their two leaders seemed to be Jack Barson and Fred Cook.

It was fortunate that Miss Rattle's cottage stood alone: no very near neighbours were disturbed by the banging of old tin trays, the rattle of bones, the beating of pots and pans, the clashing of pokers and tongs, the screeching of inferior whistles, and the persistent blowing of a cow-horn. The Rattle herself was greatly alarmed, and by the back door sent her maid out for the police. Neither Sergeant Murphy nor his assistant could be found — by the maid. As a matter of fact they were both in the very near neighbourhood of the music, greatly enjoying it, but ready at any moment to interfere if the lads showed the smallest disposition to do more than make a noise.

Happily, this making of rough music was all they wanted

to do. They had held an indignation meeting before tuning up, and it is a thousand pities that no reporter was present. I am told that Jack Barson's speech was wonderful, and that when Fred Cook called for "three groans for t' woman what tells abominable lies about t' Squire and t' young gentlemen," they might have been heard at the Hall itself.

But Jack and Fred kept their men well in hand.

"I'll punch any chap what flings a stoan, or kicks at t' dooer," said Fred. "We wunna do t' least bit o' damage. We dunna want to 'urt nobody nor nowt. We only want this woman to know that if her wants to tell confounded lies about our Squire and his lads, her'll have to goo outside t' Dale."

How long they meant to keep up their discordant music I do not know; but when they had been at it for an hour and a half, Father Horbury suddenly appeared on the scene. Failing to find the police, the servant-maid had gone to the Presbytery. The cacophony ceased, and the younger boys crept away into the darkness.

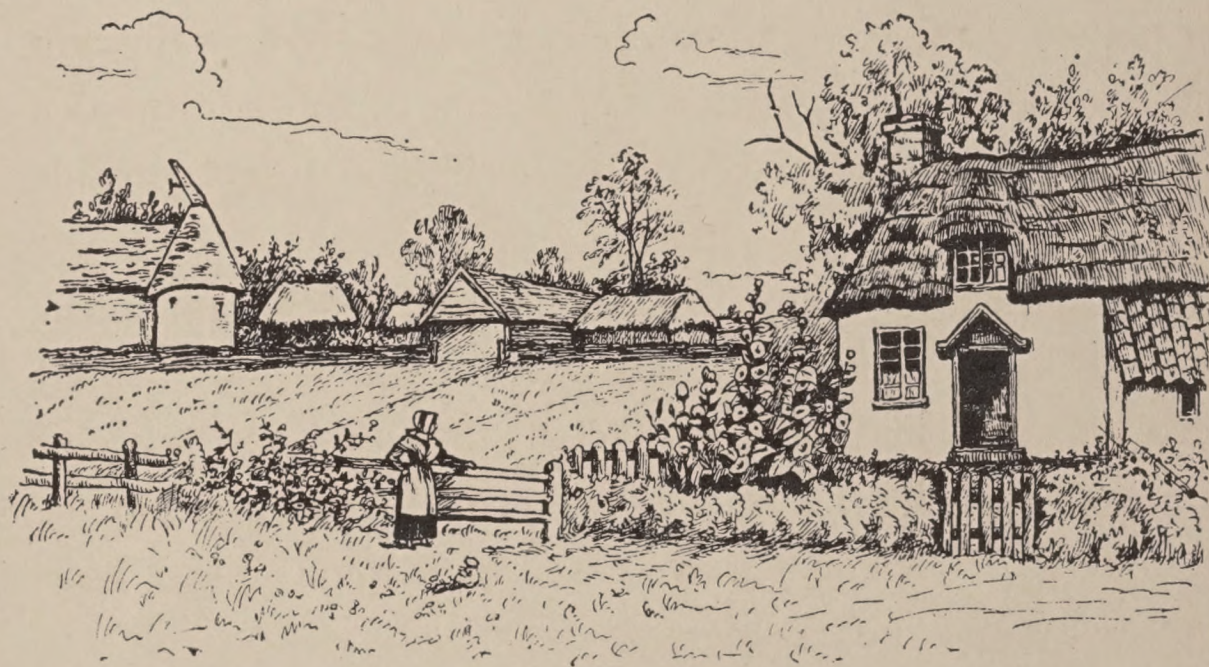
"That will do, lads," said the priest quietly. "Go home now, like good fellows. No, Fred, you need not explain" — Cook had stepped forward, cap in hand, anxious to say something — "I know all about it. I quite understand your feelings. Good-night, lads! I'm making a call here."

With a chorus of "Good-night, Feyther," the lads withdrew; but the priest had scarcely passed into Miss Rattle's

house when he heard a voice shout out: "Three cheers for Feyther 'Orbury!"

What the priest had to say to Miss Rattle was said in the passage: he would not enter her sitting-room. What he did say, I have no idea: it took but a few seconds in the saying.

What I do know is that on the following morning the departure of Miss Rattle for some unknown locality was *the* topic of conversation at many Ridingleale breakfast-tables.



FATHER HORBURY'S STORY

FATHER HORBURY'S STORY.

FATHER HORBURY was a great encourager of the *Bow-Wow*. In the bound volumes of that delightful MS. Magazine I find more than one contribution of his which I should like to borrow. However, as I



have his permission to use the following, I give it just as it first appeared.

“He’s a frightfully young fellow!”

“So much the better. Less chance of his being prosy.”

I was at a preparatory school. The speakers were two of my school-fellows: the time was Sunday morning. The old entrance-hall was in a bustle, and a little quiet hat-bashing seemed inevitable. Having brushed the silk into a due degree of Sunday shininess, several fellows were walking about with their head-gear well tucked under their arms. Only when they got into the street would they venture to put on the sacred topper. Alas! that tucking under the arm meant the subsequent discovery of something that looked more like a cylindrical door-mat than a Chris-

tian head-covering — when the too-too cautious youths found themselves well in the open and far beyond the reach of a hat-brush. Still, when a boy sees himself in a difficulty of that sort, it is wonderful what can be effected with the help of a coat-sleeve.

“Next time they shall bash it, and welcome,” said my companion, for we were walking in pairs. “Did you *ever* see such a beastly mess?”

I am bound to admit that his hat bore a close resemblance to a lady's muff.

I replied that I had seen that kind of mess before. So, in fact, had he. Only the previous Sunday both of us had spent the first five minutes of the walk to church in coat-sleeving our respective hats.

“It's one of my father's boasts that he hasn't worn a high hat for twenty years: yet he insists upon my wearing one both at home and at school.”

“It's the way of the parental world,” I said. “A fellow's mother makes a point of this sort of thing, and of course the dad gives way.”

My friend whistled a bar of the popular song of that day, “There's a good time coming”—whistled it very softly, for it was Sunday. But there came a look of determination over his face, determination so largely dashed with contempt as he glanced at the now partially brushed hat and crushed it upon his head, that a seller of toppers might have considered himself personally aggrieved.

I so fully shared in my friend's hatred of the ugly incon-

veniences under which we were staggering, that there was no room for discussion on the subject; besides, I wanted an explanation of the scrap of talk with which I began this story.

“Who’s the ‘frightfully young fellow’ Timms was talking about just now?” I asked.

“The new parson, of course,” he replied.

“Why, what’s become of the Vicar?”

“Scarborough for a parson’s fortnight. Goes every year, doesn’t he?”

“To be sure,” I said, “every September quite regularly.”

“Yes,” said my companion, “and I think it’s jolly mean of him not to give us the benefit of his absence for *three* Sundays, instead of one.”

I assented. Not that we disliked our Vicar, but that we thought a “change of parson” as good for ourselves as was the “change of air” for him.

“It’s just the same with Pickler. [Pickler was the Head Master.] If ever he goes away in the morning he’s sure to turn up again at some uncomfortable hour in the early evening, instead of stopping away for an occasional night. We should love him all the better,” my companion went on, “if we didn’t see quite so much of him.”

I agreed heartily, but begged my friend to tell me all he knew of the young *locum tenens*.

“Didn’t you see him on Friday afternoon? Pickler brought him into the playground after five. Where could you have been? O, yes, I remember: it was the day you

went up to Pickler's room, and didn't come back. By the way, I forgot to ask you —— ”

“ Don't be brutal ! ” I exclaimed, with a shiver ; “ don't you be brutal if Pickler was. Tell us all about — what did you say his name was ? ”

“ Didn't hear any name, but they say he's the old Vicar's nephew. Only just ordained, I fancy. Looks as if he ate a parched pea every third day. Must be a Puseyite, you know.”

“ Why so ? ” I asked. Few of us, at that time, had ever seen a live Puseyite.

“ 'Cause Thackeray says they're all clean-shaved, and never eat anything but parched peas.”

“ And this fellow ? ” I inquired.

“ Hasn't a whisker to bless himself with. Face as smooth as yours or mine. And, by Jove, *doesn't* he look hungry ! ”

It seemed conclusive enough. Thackeray was our idol at that time. One chapter of Thackeray was more to us than all the sermons in Christendom. Dickens was running him rather hard, of course. The little green-covered volumes were coming out regularly ; and I am afraid *our* gospel was that according to Thackeray and Dickens. We heard two sermons every week, and at one particular time of the year — three. But the little green-covered books were with us day by day : not unfrequently night by night. They became part of our very life.

“ Will he wear a *red surplice* do you think ? ”

I asked the question in perfect good faith. Not one of

us had ever seen a chasuble, but we had heard vague rumours of clergymen wearing red, yellow, and green vestments, and our only notion of ecclesiastical robes was confined to the black preaching gown, the surplice and hood. Our Vicar did not even wear a stole. A little later, an assistant master succeeded in imbuing some of us with a taste for ecclesiology and antiquarianism generally; but this period of brass-rubbing, and consequent consumption of heel-ball, had not arrived.

My friend was dubious in regard to the red surplice. He was, indeed, inclined to be sceptical as to the possible use of such things in a Protestant church. Poor old fellow! he himself has been wearing coloured vestments in an Anglican church for many years, in spite of frequent threats of prosecution.

"He couldn't try that sort of thing on here," said my school-fellow, after I had quoted some passages from *The Newcomes* to convince him that such vestments were worn. We were now almost in the church porch, but as we passed into the south aisle I whispered:

"He'll do more than 'try it on' — he'll *wear* it, *if*" — I added as a saving clause — "if he has brought it with him."

But he hadn't.

As, however, the young parson passed into the second tier of the "three-decker," I heard a whispered exclamation from my friend — "Jingo! he's got it on!"

Both of us craned our necks to look. It was only the red and black hood of the Oxford Master of Arts. Still,

even that was a change. Our Vicar was a Cambridge man; his hood was only black and white.

“Oxford!” I whispered to my friend.

“Then he’s sure to be a Puseyite,” the boy returned, opening his prayer-book at the “Form of prayer for the use of those *at Sea*.”

Both of us rose to our feet a little later than the rest, for the Service had begun. And as the parson bade us “acknowledge our manifold sins and wickedness,” I blushed guiltily, thinking how truly manifold mine were.

Sunday was not a lively day with us, except by accident. On Sundays we played no games of any kind: that is to say, we were not supposed to do so. Dickens and Thackeray were put away and locked up: at least they were supposed to be. Consequently, Sunday was spent in a round of forbidden pleasures, of which smoking was not the least; for there were no studies, other than the learning by heart of catechism and collect.

By Sunday evening, therefore, susceptible lads were wont to fall into a pensive condition, half dreamy and half melancholy. By the end of Evening Prayer, and by the time the preacher mounted the pulpit, such boys were in no mood for listening to the sermon.

Now there had been nothing extraordinary in the young clergyman’s manner of conducting the Service; nothing to give colour to the notion that he was a Puseyite; excepting perhaps the pace at which he read the prayers and lessons,

and an allusion to Christopher Columbus in the morning sermon. But one boy who declared that his sister was married to a Puseyite curate and who in consequence claimed a perfect understanding of "the whole box of tricks," as he put it, maintained that "Puseyites always took the Service at a hand-gallop, and that they worshipped Saint Christopher Columbus *like fun*."

I then ventured, very mildly, to question the canonization of the discoverer of the New World, and the dispute went on something like this:

"Do you mean to say that Columbus wasn't a Roman Catholic?"

Of course I admitted that he was a Catholic.

"Are you going to deny that his name was mentioned in this morning's sermon?"

I couldn't deny it.

"Very well then," said my opponent triumphantly, "can't you see that if he was a Catholic, and if his name was mentioned in the pulpit by a Puseyite parson — why he *must* be a saint!"

I couldn't see it, and said so. But public feeling was against me. Still, I would have another try.

"Will you swear," I asked very solemnly, "that the preacher said St. Christopher Columbus?"

The unblushing youth said he would. Several others also, were quite positive about it; but the majority wavered. I saw my chance at once.

"Now," said I, "what proof have you that the man who

discovered America and St. Christopher were not two totally different men? ”

I thought he would be crushed: but he wasn't.

“Look here!” he said, casting a glance over the group of listening lads, “ought a fellow whose sister married a Puseyite curate, to know all about these sort of things — *or ought he not?* ”

The wind of popular feeling veered round immediately. Everybody saw at once how vastly superior must be the information of a fellow whose sister, etc., etc.

My adversary fixed his eye upon me, and prepared to poise the weapon of incontrovertible *fact*.

“In my sister's husband's study hangs a picture,” — he was so pleased with this sentence that he repeated it. Then he went on, rather lamely I thought — “It hangs over the mantel-piece. It shows a man, an awfully tall man, wading through the sea with a young apple-tree in his hand. He's a long way ahead of his ship — in fact you don't see the ship at all — it's left out of the picture. *He wants to be the first on shore.* And he'll plant that young apple-tree to show that he's taken possession of the country.”

He paused for a moment, and a low murmur of conviction rose from the group of lads who had listened with intense interest to every word.

“Well,” he said, raising his voice a little for the peroration, “*my sister's husband told me that that was a picture of SAINT Christopher Columbus.*”

There was a shout of applause. Every lad present, ex-

cept myself, was convinced. I was, so to say, "done for." The Reverend the husband of the sister had carried the day.

"You'd better give in, old man," said my chum of the morning, taking me aside. "Jerker evidently knows all about it."

"But, my dear fellow," I objected, getting a light on the subject as I spoke, "I've got a *Life* of Columbus at home, and I'm positive that he's never once spoken of as Saint Christopher Columbus."

"O, there's one in the school library for that matter," he answered; "but, you know, authors often drop the *St.* in writing of these chaps. Even in our bibles — some of them at any rate, you see *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and *John*."

It was very true; but I could not get over the feeling that Jerker was in error, and said so.

"O, come now," said my chum appealingly, "have *you* got a sister married to a Puseyite parson?"

"No, I've not," I exclaimed indignantly, "and I'll take jolly good care *my* sister never does marry a man that worships Christopher Columbus."

"By Jove!" returned my friend, "I'd forgotten that part of the business. It's rank idolatry, of course."

"Course it is," I replied, "and if this young parson is a Puseyite ——"

"Which he certainly is, you know," put in my chum.

"Then," said I, every drop of my Protestant blood boiling over at the thought, "we ought not to go to church this evening; that's clear!"

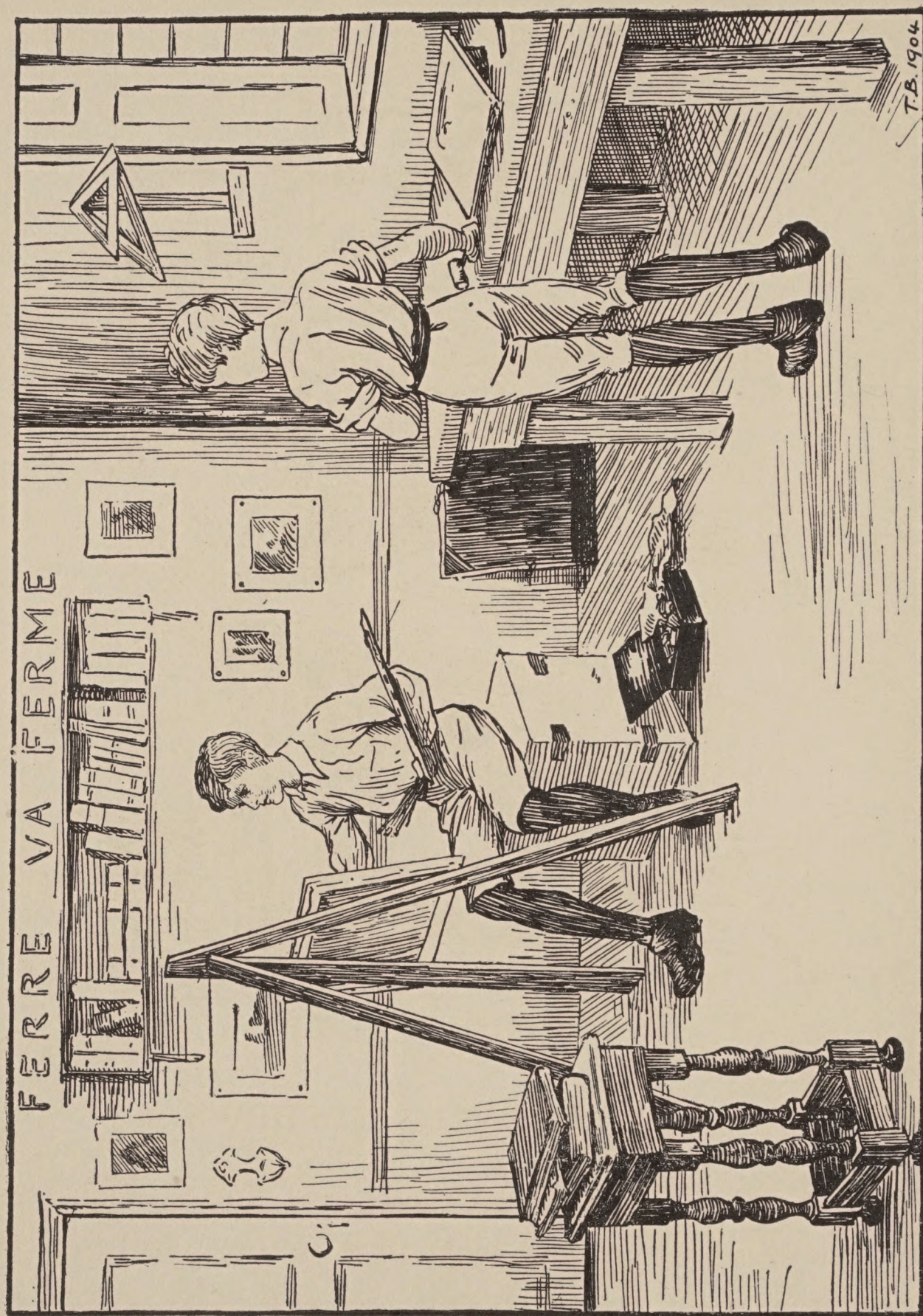
In less than five minutes the playground was in an uproar. My friend had caught fire in a moment, and the way he went to work to organize an Indignation Meeting, was worthy of a local secretary of the Church Association. *Jerker* (the boy whose sister, etc., etc.) was missing! Somebody had said that in consequence of the etc., etc., there was idolatry in the *Jerker* family: that being so, there must be some of it in *Jerker* himself. At any rate, they would take it out of *Jerker*. *Jerker* must be saved from the consequences of the etc., etc., at any cost.

But, at that moment, *Jerker* was doing his best to save himself by barricading the box-room doors — on the inside.

The siege began immediately. Ultimately the box-room was taken by assault. The result was much damage to property, and not a little hurt to persons.

For the latter, further hurt was in store. Five of us did not go to Evening Service. Mr. Pickler's Sunday floggings were always memorable: on this occasion he excelled himself. Before the bells had ceased chiming for church, five smarting boys were lying in five supperless beds. As the reputed ringleader, I received extra — shall I say *marks*?

THE COLONEL'S NEPHEWS





THE COLONEL'S NEPHEWS.

THE Colonel's nephews were a joke at Ridingdale Hall. As Lance said, "they were more than you ever had time to count, and the best of it was that they were not really nephews, but only the sons of nephews." Fortunately, the Colonel would rarely entertain more than one at a time.

Some, indeed, came, remained a few days, and went away — never to reappear. For not all of them were acceptable either to their uncle or to the boys of Riddingdale Hall, and one or two visits had ended in notable and lamentable ructions with the Colonel.

Two, and two only, of these grand-nephews had been formally offered the Freedom of Sniggery; though this is not to say that only two of these occasional visitors to the Chantry — and therefore to the Hall — were worthy. But the Freedom of Sniggery was an honour not lightly bestowed. Before you could boast of that dignity, you had to be a credit to yourself and to your upbringing. It was not quite enough that you were “a dencentish sort of a chap;” it was demanded of you that you be a downright good fellow.

Even this quality did not secure your immediate election. You had to be proposed and seconded and voted for. Moreover — and this was the test of tests — you were not even accepted as a candidate until you had passed a certain preliminary examination. Considerately enough, an adult was exempted from the ordeal; but no boy under twenty-one could be more than a tolerated guest in Sniggery who had not passed his matriculation.

Now, it is a sad fact that only two of the Colonel's nephews had ever succeeded in satisfying the examiners. Doubtless they had given some kind of satisfaction to other examiners, for they were school-boys each and all, and their ages ranged from eleven to nineteen; with the exception of

a rather weakly boy who was taught by a private tutor, they were all at one or the other of the big public schools. It may, of course, be urged that the examination-papers were not on the usual lines, and that occasionally they were drawn up with a view of excluding from Sniggery all but exceptional boys.

Ridingdale Hall was one of those places where books were not only talked about, but read: I may add, re-read. They were not merely found in every room of the house, but on every window-seat and sofa and table. In the big drawing-room there were two of those old transomed and mullioned windows with deep recesses and broad sills, and on the cushioned seats that ran round their alcoves you would always find the books of the day — if they were worthy ones. In the small drawing-room beyond, Mrs. Ridingdale's own apartment, you would discover a very select little library, largely made up of devotional works and those quasi-classics that at certain moments are more acceptable to the weary than the Hundred Best Books. In the Squire's own writing-room were not merely the hundred, but the thousand-and-one standard works of every age.

What impressed a youthful visitor so much was that in an apartment like the one known as Arts-and-Crafts — a big play-room really, where the boys might make any reasonable kind of mess, and where something was always being designed or executed — there was a collection of volumes the very titles of which delighted a genuine book-lover.

“If opportunity makes the thief,” Mr. Ridingdale said,

“why should not another kind of opportunity make the reader? No boy who knows his Scott and Dickens will ever care very much for mere trash. Having chosen the noblest, all meaner choice, as the poet says, is poisoned for evermore.”

Under any circumstances, Arts-and-Crafts was a delightful room. One of the biggest in the house, it was given over entirely to the boys — I mean, of course, the Snigs, for the little ones were not encouraged there — and was by them put to a variety of uses. It was studio, workshop, green-room, and play-room. You could not go into it on any holiday without seeing a boy painting at his easel, or hammering at his bench, or turning his lathe, or doing some kind of carving or fretwork. It had been furnished almost entirely by its occupiers, and though it had but one real chair, it could boast of many seats — low seats, chiefly of the order of the transformed box. Indeed, many of these extemporized lounges were only packing-cases covered with odd bits of drapery, but they made a brave, if rather motley appearance, and being low and usually placed against the wall, were by no means uncomfortable to sit upon. The floor was of solid oak and, of course, uncarpeted, and though unmistakable marks of clog-irons could be seen here and there, and evidences of spilled chemicals and paint, all things considered, it was kept fairly free from dirt.

But it is certain that the presence of abundant books added greatly to the delightfulness of Arts-and-Crafts. On the home-made shelves could be found not only complete

sets of the leading English writers but a good long row of books of reference, whose pages frequently settled a disputed point or solved a practical difficulty. An encyclopædia of venerable appearance was not unfrequently consulted and found of great value; though the erudite George sometimes refused to accept its information until he had consulted a newer edition in his father's study. An exceptionally tattered book now and then disappeared, and the Squire one day told the Colonel that no edition of *White's Selborne* or of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* could be made to last the boys more than six months. This remark led to a delightful arrangement proposed by the Colonel — and indeed settled by him in a thoroughly practical manner. For though this good martinet affected to be very scornful of Arts-and-Crafts, and the articles made therein, he was really much interested in it and everything connected with it.

The accidental picking-up of a volume of Shakespeare that lay open on Lance's work-board led up to this proposal, for no sooner had the Colonel taken the book into his hand than it fell to the floor in hundreds of loose leaves. As Lance laughingly collected the scattered pages, he explained that this particular copy was not meant to be handled, but only to lie open on a table. So then and there the Colonel suggested that each boy should make for himself a little book-case, and put it near the place where he worked. Every fellow, he said, ought to have his own copy of Shakespeare, and he, the Colonel, would lay the foundation of these miniature libraries by giving each lad a complete

edition of this great poet. In his characteristically teasing way he added that Lance in his strongest clogs must have kicked the old copy up and down the room; an accusation that brought indignant denial from Lance — who, however, soon perceived that the Colonel was in a mood that he intended to be jocular.

Book-binding itself was practised on a small scale, and particularly upon well-thumbed and broken-backed volumes that eventually found their way to Sniggery. For though no books were permitted to lie there from September to April, during the warmer months of the year you could always find on its table a volume of Tennyson — an immense favourite with all the boys — a copy of *Ivanhoe* or *Woodstock*, of *Pickwick* or *David Copperfield*, and the inevitable Shakespeare. For here again, as the Squire well knew, opportunity made the reader. He did not drive horses to the water and try to force them to drink, but he took care that wherever his boys found themselves good books should abound.

Occupiers of Arts-and-Crafts breathed more freely — no mere figurative expression — when Hilary was no longer permitted to make chemical experiments within its walls. For a time these experiments were very popular; eventually, however, they were found to interfere so seriously with the various artistic works carried on by the rest — to say nothing of the smells, and an explosion or two that might have damaged the experimenter and his audience for life — that a

separate small room was given over to the budding chemist, and Hilary's laboratory became a domestic institution.

Perhaps with the exception of Hilary who, though fond of a certain sort of reading, did not take kindly to literature as such, no four boys in Shakespeare-land, as England has been called, were more familiar with our great author's tragedies, comedies, and histories, than Harry and George, Willie and Lance. It is true that Harry was more at home with the comedies than the tragedies, and that Lance showed a particular affection for the histories, though he loved the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, and parts of *Cymbeline*. But both George and Willie Murrington may be said to have possessed their Shakespeare — as for example, German boys possess him; though the former had vastly keener enjoyment of both matter and manner than any German lad could ever experience.

They knew their Shakespeare, and many another English author, as they knew the corridors and rooms of their own home, the glens and glades of their own park, the intricacies of the wood and the windings of the river. With a suggestion from father here, and a recommendation from mother there; with a little encouragement from tutor or master, and always the right books lying handy at the right time and in the convenient place, they had almost unconsciously acquired a treasure of knowledge of the classics of their country. A complete absence of merely sporting and ephemeral papers was a big help to them, for though they were second to none in their keenness for cricket and football, they were content

to play the game and enjoy it, as gentlemen should, and to leave "the latest intelligence" to professionals. Father always gave them the cricket news at breakfast, and any other item from the *Morning Nuisance* (as he called every daily paper) that he thought might interest them.

These things being so, it was not to be wondered at if they expected to find a like acquaintance with good literature in every boy they met. In this matter they had their disappointments. From the village lads they did not look for a cultivated taste in art and letters; in boys of their own class they felt that they had a right to find it, particularly among those with whom, from time to time, they were expected to be intimate; and, for certain excellent reasons, they fully expected to meet with it in the Colonel's nephews.

To give anything like a complete history of the Colonel's nephews would be to write a bigger book than the reader would care for. Besides, few of them were particularly notable; some of them were much too commonplace even to be described on a printed page. They were all well clad, mostly in faultless Etons; occasionally one of them would show good form in the cricket-field. Under their great-uncle's roof they generally behaved fairly well. Some of them had a drawing-room manner, and another manner — one that was not quite so polite. Some had an acquaintance with the latest comic song and the newest burlesque — often written in ridicule of a classic that literary men and scholars hold dear, and almost sacred. Some of them were accomplished smokers and proficient tipsters, and as Lance and

his brothers sometimes found to their sorrow, if you could not talk about the music-hall and the very latest race news, the visitors were undisguisedly bored. During the long summer holiday, which was the time they usually came to the Chantry, the Ridingdale boys racked their brains to find means of entertaining these young people — so quickly tired of tennis and cricket, and who took no pains to disguise their scorn of the two tubs, *St. Nicholas* and *St. Stanislaus*, which Hilary and his brothers regarded as boats.

Happily the Colonel came to the rescue now and then with a big picnic, or a garden-party, or a driving expedition, and in the presence of their soldier-uncle the visitors were less objectionable.

But it must be remembered that we are speaking now of a period of time ranging over some five or six years, and of a succession of young visitors to the Chantry, some of whom came for only a few days and never repeated their visit. Happily, too, there were three or four who were always acceptable, and with whom the Squire's boys were on the most affectionate terms.



THE COMING OF ARTHUR

THE COMING OF ARTHUR.

WE know something of the character and disposition of Lance Ridingdale at the age of thirteen and fourteen; need I say that in his earlier years he was very much the same as the boy I have so often described — only more so. At the time of the coming of Arthur, Lance was eleven. And if I dwell a little upon the manner of their introduction, and the details of their first meeting, it is not that I take pleasure or pride in the conduct of either boy, or that I approve of their methods.

Arthur Leighson was paying his first visit to his uncle, and therefore to Ridingdale Hall. Having arrived at the Chantry only the night before, the Colonel proposed to his nephew an after-luncheon walk to the Hall. Meeting Dr. Nuttlebig on the road, the old soldier stopped to chat, telling Arthur to walk straight on towards the Hall, and that he would catch him up. But a chat between the doctor and the Colonel always meant an argument of some kind, and Arthur arrived at the park long before his uncle.

Turning in at the big oaken gates, Arthur soon saw at



some distance off the carriage-drive a number of lads of different ages, chopping wood, and careering about a fallen elm with axes and hatchets. Making his way up to them, the stranger addressed himself to Lance, who was working at some distance from his brothers.

“ I say, kid! whose shanty is this? ”

Lance dropped his small axe and stared at the new-comer without speaking.

“ Why don’t you answer my question, kiddy? ” said Arthur, eyeing Lance’s blouse and clogs. “ I ’spose your head’s about as wooden as your boots.”

“ Who are you calling kid? ” demanded Lance, stepping right up to the new-comer.

“ You, of course.”

“ How old are *you*? ” Lance asked — I am afraid with some scorn.

“ Old enough to lick your head off, you little cad,” was the polite retort.

Lance put his fists in the pockets of his knickerbockers, partly because his hands were not very clean, partly to keep them out of temptation. Wood-hauling and chopping were going on with such vigour that Hilary, Harry, and George scarcely noticed the coming of Arthur.

“ Don’t think my head ’ll come off in a hurry,” Lance remarked with a smile, as he examined the trousered and Eton-jacketed boy from his tall hat to his patent-leather shoes: “ wasn’t put on loose, you know. Like to have a try? ”

Almost unconsciously, as he spoke, he stepped a little nearer to the stranger. Arthur's temptation was great, and he did not resist it. With his open hand he struck Lance a sounding blow on the cheek. Four white marks lay on the right side of Lance's plump and rosy face. His smile had quite vanished, and his eyes blazed.

"Better hang your hat up somewhere," he remarked with a deadly sort of calmness that made Arthur's pasty cheek turn yellow; "we'll find a dry place somewhere for your jacket."

Lance was already rolling up the sleeves of his shirt and blouse, for he had no jacket under the latter. In a sort of frightened silence Arthur removed hat and coat.

"Let's get where the ground's quite level: there! behind that big oak. And look here! if you're the younger, you shall have your back to the sun. How old are you?"

"Just turned eleven," muttered Arthur, upon whom a most unpleasant suspicion was beginning to dawn that he was not only going to be severely pummelled, but that his antagonist was a son of the house he was about to visit. It seemed to him quite too late for explanations.

"Well, I've only just turned eleven," Lance said, "but it's all right. I'll face the sun."

As a matter of fact each of them in turn had the afternoon sun in his eyes, for the preliminary dance round lasted for sometime.

Lance knew that he had an easy victory, but he wanted to see what his enemy was made of. Round and round

they went in a sort of irregular circle, Arthur now and again hitting out with a sort of despairing fury, Lance easily parrying the blows and trying to make up his mind where it would be safest to smite this unmuscular and unscientific young person. Indeed, if Lance had not been so exasperated by Arthur's preliminary assault, he would have been inclined to pity him for his thin, stick-like arms and general appearance of unfitness for handling anything heavier than a tea-cup or a battledore.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Lance, as at the first real blow Arthur toppled over, "only say when you're ready."

But the foe was in a hurry, and closed with Lance so sharply and suddenly that the latter's chief anxiety became how to avoid setting his clogged foot upon the other's dainty shoe. Making a passionate rush upon Lance's fist, Arthur realized that one of his teeth had been loosened and his lip cut.

"Better stop the bleeding," Lance suggested; but Arthur would stop for nothing — until for the second time he found himself lying on the grass.

"Let me get your handkerchief," said Lance, running to fetch the enemy's jacket. "Don't let the blood drop on your waistcoat."

Arthur took the proffered jacket and found his handkerchief.

"You must say, you know, when you want to shake hands," Lance hazarded. "Sorry we haven't got a sponge."

"Haven't done with you yet," said Arthur, soon throwing away his few square inches of cambric and getting into position. Suddenly, however, he changed his tactics. He had seen wrestling — in a boy's paper; he had studied a certain "fall" — in theory. Springing cat-like upon Lance, he pinned his enemy's arms to his side.

But only for a moment. Though completely taken by surprise, Lance planted his sturdy feet well apart and waited. Frantically Arthur tried by twisting his thin leg round Lance's to pull him over. He might just as well have tried to uproot a young oak-tree. With a sudden jerk of his arms Lance freed himself, and, after lifting his enemy bodily into the air, laid him down slowly upon the grass.

"Had enough?" Lance laconically inquired.

"Think so," was the answer.

"Well, you'll shake hands, won't you? Sorry you're damaged, but I didn't force you to spar, did I?"

"That's all right," said Arthur, getting up and shaking hands. "*I struck the first blow: that's a fact.*"

"Hum! did you now? Thought so."

Both the boys turned with a start. It was the Colonel! And Lance at once realized that he had assaulted a nephew.

"Nice young man, aren't you now?" the Colonel said, turning his grand-nephew round by the collar. "Pretty mess you're in too! Thought a tea-fight the most exciting combat you'd ever been in. Up to this, I 'spose it was."

Though Lance was not a little concerned, and had a vision of himself spending the rest of the day in handcuffs or

leg-irons, or both, he could not help smiling. Nay, venturing to take one quick glance at the Colonel's face, it seemed as if something very like a smile was hovering beneath the good man's moustache. But the Colonel saw the glance, and not only immediately straightened his features but turned upon Lance with severity.

"Yes, and *you*, sir! Nice way of introducing yourself to a perfect stranger — and *my* nephew — isn't it? What about the laws of hospitality and — and all that sort of thing?"

"I hit him first, you know, uncle," interposed Arthur, putting on his jacket. "Of course, I didn't know who he was. You see, I insulted him before I hit him. I thought he was a — I mean — well, I didn't think ——"

"Don't stand chattering there," the Colonel interrupted as his nephew began to flounder. "What you want is a good wash."

"I'll take him to Sarah, shall I, Colonel?" Lance suggested.

"That's it. Off you run, both of you!"

The Colonel sat in the Squire's study, telling the story of the fight, and laughing heartily. Mr. Ridingdale looked grave.

"It is good of you to take it like that," he was saying, "but I am exceedingly sorry that Lance should so forget himself."

"But really, Jack, it's the best thing that could possibly have happened to that young suburban whipper-snapper.

It's not his fault altogether, but he really is a conceited little ass. He's fatherless, as you know, and his mother is a right-down fool. My poor nephew married beneath him, and the silly woman is as full of pretensions as an egg is full of meat. She has already taken the lad away from half a dozen preparatory schools — either because they didn't put his hair in curl-papers every night, or wouldn't lace his boots for him, or some rot of that kind. The wonder is that he is endurable. She has done her level best to bring him up as a fop and a coward rolled into one. And he's to be a soldier, forsooth! Good heavens! what is the army coming to?"

An hour or two later, George and Lance were sitting together on the back of a garden seat in a quiet corner of the lawn, talking over the events of the afternoon.

Though at this time George was not yet thirteen, he was quite the most thoughtful of Lance's many brothers, and it was to George that one instinctively turned in all cases of doubt or perplexity.

George himself was a little troubled. A fight was always a sad thing, and he blamed himself for not seeing that Lance had slipped away from the wood chopping. Of course if the two had begun to spar on the spot where Arthur had first spoken so insultingly to Lance, Hilary would instantly have interfered; but the combatants had not only moved away into a sort of hollow where the ground was flat, but had screened themselves from view by getting behind a leafy oak of considerable circumference. So busy were Hilary and

the rest that only Harry saw the approach of Arthur Leighson; but as he was some distance off the place where Lance was standing, Harry heard neither the discourteous greeting of the Colonel's nephew, nor his brother's retort.

Here and now in the cool of the evening, clothed, as it



were, and in a calm and equable frame of mind, Lance seemed inclined to discuss the matter from a moral point of view. A question trembled on his lips — a question that he did not like to put, but one that would naturally occur to any boy whose conscience was tender. He had already asked a great many other questions, and though George,

like the honest fellow he was, had said quite plainly that he could not answer all of them, he had for the most part responded wisely and well.

“It’s very funny,” Lance was saying, “how just after anything of this sort you feel awfully pleased with yourself — specially if you’ve licked the other chap — and then when you’ve cooled down you begin to wish it hadn’t happened.”

“That’s very natural,” George said. “Of course you had a lot of provocation. I fancy father would say that a thing like this oughtn’t to be taken too seriously — or too lightly.”

“I told Arthur how sorry I was, just as he was going away.”

“That’s all right. What did he say?”

“Well,” laughed Lance, “he put his finger to his lip to see if it was still bleeding, and said ‘So am I.’”

George did not suppress a smile.

“You can see for yourself,” said the elder boy after a short pause, “that one should have oneself better in hand than go fisticuffing with every fellow who happens to say something one doesn’t like.”

“’Tis rather what the gutter-lads do — isn’t it?”

“Very much so,” said George, “and there’s precious little bravery in just losing one’s temper; though mind you, Lannie, in your circumstances I’m afraid — yes, I’m afraid I should have gone for him.”

“Don’t think you would, George. You remember those

verses we all learnt in the nursery — called ‘Heroes and Saints,’ weren’t they? Well, you know, they came back to me to-day when I was fighting. Now if they’d come back to you, you’d have stopped, I’ll bet. You remember that verse — how does it go?

I’d like to be a brave boy, mama,
And I would not mind for pain;
But if anybody gave me a blow, mama,
I’d give it him back again.

Now, George, I’m afraid that’s just *me*.”

“But it needn’t be, old man.”

Again silence fell upon the brothers. The shadows upon the lawn began to lengthen. Wood-pigeons cooed soothingly. The south-west wind came laden with the breath of roses and mignonette.

“I say, George, do you think ——”

The question still trembled on Lance’s lips.

“Do I think — what, old man?”

“Well, do you think it was a — I mean, ought I to go to confession to-night?”

“Really, Lannie, I hardly know. I don’t think you’re bound. Better ask mother, or father.”

Five minutes later Harry said to his mother, “Wherever is Lannie pelting off to at this time o’ night? He nearly knocked me over as I came in.”

“Lannie has just run down to the Presbytery, dear,” said Mrs. Riddingdale.

THE REMAINING OF ARTHUR



THE REMAINING OF ARTHUR.

To say that Arthur found life beneath his uncle's roof slow and monotonous does not express the matter fully. Crowded with objects of art, the Chantry was an interesting house to explore, but being a house, and not a South Kensington Museum, it was soon exhausted. The Colonel's library was a delight; unfortunately Arthur read nothing, if he could help it, but the *Boys' Ripper*. Music was the old

soldier's daily solace; but the youngster said all indoor music made his head ache. The Colonel asked him if he could ride, and, though (like that of the man who did not play the fiddle) his reply was a cautious one, Arthur was so anxious to try that the pony was ordered round. When his uncle saw him put the wrong foot in the stirrup, the good man tried not to make any remark; but when he noticed that the would-be rider was trembling in every limb, the Colonel foresaw an inquest — and said so. The pony went back to the stables.

That day, luckily, Harry and George and Lance were coming to lunch at the Chantry, so Arthur tried to kill the morning by exploring the Ridingle shops. He meant to do his best to impress upon Miss Rippell, upon Kelveston the confectioner, upon Colpington the chemist, and various other tradespeople, the fact of their exceeding inferiority, both as individuals and shopkeepers; but, blind as at that time he was to his own condition of conceited puppydom, he could not but own to himself afterwards that they one and all utterly refused to be impressed by a top-hatted youngster with a Cockney accent and the manners of a music-hall call-boy.

He started rather badly at Miss Rippell's, and only her natural urbanity and serenity of temper prevented a downright altercation.

"Look here! I want the *Boys' Ripper*," he began, turning over various periodicals that lay on the counter. "And be sharp, because I'm in a hurry."

Miss Rippell did not keep an assortment of smiles for different classes of customers: she had one unvarying expression, and it was an exceedingly agreeable one.

“That is a paper I don’t stock,” she replied pleasantly; “but I have all the best boys’ papers,” she continued, turning over a pile of current periodicals.

“Oh, I don’t read dry rot of that sort,” he said contemptuously; “I want the *Ripper*. Just you order it for me, and don’t forget!”

Miss Rippell shook her head. “No, I can’t do that — unless your uncle particularly wishes it,” she said. “I think you’re one of his little nephews, are you not?”

Arthur particularly objected to the adjective “little” as applied to himself; indeed, if Miss Rippell had chosen the word with a view of hurting the youngster — which she had not — she could not have made a better selection.

“Well, you just are a putrid lot of clodhoppers in this beastly hole,” he burst out. “I’ll tell my uncle what I think about you when I get home.”

“Perhaps,” suggested Miss Rippell with composure, “you will be good enough to say that I shall have the greatest pleasure in getting anything for which he may send me a written order. *Good morning!*”

With a muttered imprecation that she did not catch, the small Cockney swung himself out of the shop, his temper in very bad repair.

A favourite idiom of William Lethers’ was that “you couldn’t get no change out o’ Mester Colpington.” This did

not refer to money handed over the counter; it meant that James Colpington, chemist and druggist, High Street, Ridingdale, Yorks, was a man very well able to take care of himself.

At this time there was no tobacconist's shop in Ridingdale, and indeed when one was started people had become so used to getting their tobacco and snuff from the grocer's, and their cigars and cigarettes from Colpington's, that they mistrusted a man who sold the weed and nothing but the weed, and his little establishment failed.

Stopping to look at the chemist's window, Arthur at once noticed some boxes of cigarettes. Now Arthur's one accomplishment — an accomplishment he shared with gutter children and newspaper boys — was smoking. He told himself that what he needed at this time was a quiet smoke — in some quiet and secret place. Unsuccessfully he had tried to "nick" one of his uncle's cigars: perhaps it was well for Arthur that the Colonel was careful not to leave such things lying about. Not every grown-up man was equal to a Ruggerson cigar.

Pushing back Colpington's swing-door, Arthur heard a bell ring in the distance. The shop was empty, and the boy took from his pocket a half-crown wherewith to hammer the counter. The church clock had just struck eleven, and if Arthur had been a native of Ridingdale he would have known quite well that on the first stroke of eleven Mr. Colpington always retired to his sitting-room to refresh himself with a glass of beer and a biscuit. But the number

of things that Arthur did not know was large, and one of them was that you might hammer Colpington's counter into tooth-picks before that excellent man would leave his biscuit and beer to wait upon you: in matters of urgency you were expected to find your way to him. Not knowing these things, and many others, Arthur went on hammering viciously, and using words that right-minded men and boys do not use.

Perhaps three full minutes passed before Mr. Colpington appeared, looking aggravatingly pleased with himself, and in no sort of hurry whatever.

"Good-morning!" he said cheerfully, but eyeing Arthur a little more keenly than that young gentleman appreciated; "thought it was my lad come back from an errand, and hammering at that case of empties. What can I do for you, sir?"

There were certain things that Mr. Colpington did not know; one of them was that his "sir" had been uttered just in time to prevent an explosion — or shall we say a splutter?

"I want some cigarettes: a box. Best you've got."

Mr. Colpington swung round on his heel and hastened to open a drawer that was certainly not labelled *tobacco*. He may have wanted to hide a smile: who knows? At any rate, he turned round again to the counter and began to scrape a pestle lying there in a huge mortar.

There are two ways of absorbing conversation. One is to start at a rush and drown your opponent in a flood of

words. A second, and perhaps a more effective method, is to speak slowly, incisively, but *continuously*, and without giving the least opportunity of being interrupted. Of the latter method Mr. Colpington was perfect master.

“How’s the lip getting on?” he began, leaning over the counter to get a nearer view of it—to Arthur’s intense disgust. “Ah, I see it’s beginning to heal nicely. Well, that’s all right. Rather a tough customer to tackle, that Master Lance, isn’t he? All muscle, from head to heel, eh? Very hearty and healthy young gentlemen the Squire’s sons, aren’t they? Tooth not broken, is it? Glad of that. It’s not nice to get a front tooth broken. Spoils one’s beauty, doesn’t it? You must get the young Ridingdales to teach you to box. I don’t hold with fighting, of course: but it’s important to know how to use one’s fists. Eh? I beg your pardon: cigarettes, did you say?”—Arthur’s interruption had certainly been emphatic enough—“Well, now”—Colpington’s smile was delightful—“it’s of course very nice of you to think of making your uncle a little present, but between me and you and this pestle and mortar”—here the chemist dropped his voice and became quite confidential—“Colonel Ruggerson never smokes cigarettes. In fact, he can’t bear the sight of them. You might just as well offer him a box of powders. The very sight of a cigarette makes him furious.”

“But I don’t want them for him,” Arthur managed to interpolate, almost in a shriek.

“Oh, I see. You want to give them to the boys at the

Hall?" Here Colpington became very serious indeed, and shook his head solemnly. "Well, now, you take my advice — don't! There's not one of them that smokes: they don't want to. If they did, they wouldn't be allowed; but they don't. They'd only give them to their father — who, by the way, always smokes a pipe; and he might tell your uncle, and your uncle would be angry. You may not know it, but the Colonel can make himself uncommonly unpleasant sometimes. He's got very strong views about boy-smokers. Why, if he knew that I sold you a box of cigarettes, I should never hear the last of it. He's in my shop most days ——"

Arthur did not wait for more. Partly in rage, and partly in fear of the sudden appearance of his uncle, the boy dashed through the swing-door as quickly as if the chemist had threatened his life. And a burst of laughter from Colpington followed him down the street.

One fact had been so constantly impressed upon his mind by his mother, that Arthur may be said to have been possessed by it: it was that the only moneyed relative he had in the world was Colonel Ruggerson. Therefore, his mother had insisted, not to offend that gentleman was not merely Arthur's duty but his one hope of inheriting a property that many other grand-nephews were anxious to share. Conscious that by his fight with Lance Ridingdale he had begun badly, and that the events of the morning had not precisely prejudiced the uncle in his favour, he was more than anxious to avoid anything that might unduly

anger his relative. But the boy was furious with Colpington — who had really done him a very great service. It hurt his pride exceedingly to discover that the news of his being badly mauled by Lance had become common property; but to have been made a fool of by “a common shop-keeper,” as the insolent child would have called the good chemist, was unbearable. To say nothing of the time he had spent hammering at the counter, there he had stood for a good ten minutes merely to be chaffed, and to come away cigaretteless!

Consolation and confectionery are, to a boy, interchangeable terms: Arthur wanted all the consolation he could get, and for half-a-crown he hoped to get a good deal. Kelveston's window was second to none in attractiveness, and, though at that moment no boy in the wide world could have been less hungry, Arthur marched into the shop and immediately attacked a pork-pie, hot from the oven. Kelveston and a plate appeared at the same moment.

“Mind the gravy, sir!”

The confectioner was too late. Arthur was not accustomed to hot pork-pies, and had not given this one credit for holding gravy. Wherefore a big splash of fatty liquid fell upon the front of his Eton jacket. Kelveston ran to get a napkin, and the boy swore audibly.

Now the chemist and the confectioner were very different men, and the difference chiefly consisted in the fact that Colpington always said what he thought and Kelveston did not — at any rate to a customer. Kelveston had, perhaps,

absorbed a little of the saccharine, not to say oily, character of his goods. In his heart he strongly disapproved of the use of strong language, but he would not say so to a boy who was already attacking his second pie, and whose eyes were fixed upon a plate of puffs.

Kelveston called everybody "sir," or "madam," and spoke apologetically of the weather. Arthur had no interest at all in the weather; he was absorbed in considering if, after the demolition of the second pie, he would start upon the puffs or the open tarts.

Making the circuit of the counter he came upon a dish of cheese-cakes — lemon. With one eye still upon the puffs — three-cornered, you know, and easily disposed of — he was benignant enough to assure Mr. Kelveston that the lemon cheese-cakes were "no end good." The confectioner did not blush, but his acknowledgment was modest and sweet. Finishing the fourth cheese-cake, Arthur helped himself to a puff. After that he had a bottle of lemonade, and gave up keeping count of the various delicacies that appealed to him, and not in vain. He told himself that it was the duty of the confectioner to keep count: it was a duty that Kelveston never missed.

The church clock struck twelve, and remembering that the luncheon was at one o'clock Arthur concluded that perhaps for the present he had had enough. Kelveston was accuracy itself in reckoning up — doing it audibly and showing a great genius for mental arithmetic: to the consternation of Dr. Nuttlebig who, suddenly called to a case

out of town, had looked in to get a sandwich. Arthur did not know the doctor, and felt inclined to ask him "What he was jolly well staring at?"

"You don't mean to say that that lad has just *eaten* all the stuff he's paid for?" the amazed doctor inquired, when Arthur had left the shop.

"Every bit of it, sir," said Kelveston.

"Who is he?"

"One of the Colonel's nephews, sir."

"Thought so. Well, if I'm called in to-morrow, I shall know what's the matter with *him!*"



THE COLONEL'S LUNCHEON

THE COLONEL'S LUNCHEON.

WHENEVER he entertained, the Colonel was at his best. As the Ridingdale boys always said, not only were his luncheons ripping, but so was the host himself. He seemed always to get the very things the boys liked best. Lance called these entertainments "birdy dinners"—for to him and his brothers they counted as dinners. Doubtless the good Colonel carefully avoided providing anything that they were likely to get very often at home; but it was wonderful how he contrived to make the solid part of the meal so delightfully *birdy*. Then, too, he seemed to save up all his very best stories for these occasions:

"Real Rattlers, you know," Lance said, "and every one of them true; all about the Mutiny and Indian things, snakes and tigers and Thugs, and chaps of that sort. And if you *have* heard some of



them before — well, if a tale is really good, you like to have it again. In fact, sometimes the Colonel remembers bits that he forgot all about when he told us the tale the first time.”

On this particular day, when the boys arrived at the Chantry, Arthur Leighson was making a very careful toilet. He put on his best Etons, a pair of evening shoes, and some cuffs that reached his knuckles. Two cambric handkerchiefs he soaked in some abominable essence: with something out of a bigger bottle he deluged his hair. On the whole, he felt pleased with himself, but he could not help wishing that he had a better appetite.

When he entered the morning-room he found Lance laughing over the current *Punch*; the rest were deep in some illustrated papers that the Colonel had bought expressly for his nephew. Perhaps it took Arthur about thirty seconds to realize that he was in the presence of four exceedingly well-bred as well as well-dressed boys. For though their Eton suits were somewhat worn, and their boots a little thicker than his dancing-shoes, Arthur could not but realize that in their presence he was anything but an imposing figure.

Moved to much laughter by one of Charles Keene's delightful drawings, Lance did not immediately notice the entrance of the boy he had so recently fought: but as Arthur began to shake hands with Hilary, Harry, and George, Lance rushed forward and gave his old enemy a grip so

hearty that one would have thought them very old friends indeed.

The luncheon could not have been "birdier," nor could the talk have been merrier. Arthur was the only silent member of the party of six, and he was silent for two reasons: he was not hungry, but he was forcing himself to eat; he knew absolutely nothing of the books and the pictures, the games and sports, upon which these four merry lads were as eloquent as song-thrushes in spring. The Colonel was radiant.

Arthur had trifled with chicken and played with roast duck and green peas, but it soon became clear to the Colonel that his nephew was not making a meal. However, the good man reflected that the lad had had an amazing breakfast, and that probably he had taken very little walking exercise. But it was when the grouse came on the table that Arthur suddenly turned very pale and hastily left the dining-room.

The Colonel sent a message to his housekeeper, and in a very short time the housekeeper sent a message to the Colonel.

"It's all right," said the latter to his guests. "He's a little bilious, that's all. Change of air and food, you know — shaken up a bit by the journey. That's right, Harry, have another bit of grouse. Shot 'em myself on the 12th. Hardly hung long enough, have they? But they're not tough."

Then the Colonel told a grouse-story, which was received with such peals of boyish laughter that a most exceedingly miserable young gentleman upstairs wished all confectioners and cooks and uncles and Ridingdale boys at Jericho — but particularly confectioners.

An hour or two later Arthur bestowed the same wish upon Dr. Nuttlebig, and upon his physic. The doctor was kindly facetious, but his patient was in no mood for humour.

“ Well, I won't give you away this time,” said the medical man as he took his leave. “ It was by the merest accident that I overheard the catalogue of things you had at Kelveston's. But making all allowances for a young appetite — well, my lad, there is such a thing as gluttony, and gluttony is a particularly ugly sin — eh? ”

THE CONDUCT OF ARTHUR

THE CONDUCT OF ARTHUR.

I.

It must have been a week after the boys' luncheon-party, it may have been a little more, when one morning Colonel Ruggerson appeared at the Hall greatly perturbed and excited. They had just finished breakfast, and the Squire and Mrs. Ridingdale immediately carried off the distressed visitor to the study.

"Most awful catastrophe!" he exclaimed. "To a man of my habits nothing more dreadful could have happened. That boy's mother has married again and bolted! Think of it! Writes as cool as you please, saying she knows that I will look after dear Arthur. Gracious heavens! fancy my being saddled with a boy! And such a boy!"

It was his wont in all his annoyances to run to the Hall;



generally, the Colonel's troubles were of the crumpled rose-leaf order.

"It's the very middle of the holidays," he panted. "Couldn't get him into any school now for love or money. And I was just asking myself if I could possibly stand him for another day when this confounded letter came."

Mr. and Mrs. Ridingdale looked at one another. They quite understood what the Colonel wanted them to do.

"Of course he'll go to school directly the holidays are over; but it isn't nearly the end of August yet, and schools don't open for another month, do they? Or more, eh? Long before that time I shall be in a padded cell," the Colonel moaned.

It was hard for the Squire and his wife not to smile, but they managed to go on looking sympathetic. They did more. They both said that if the Colonel cared to send the boy to them they would try to make him happy.

Apparently the Colonel did care to send Arthur to them; at any rate, long before noon, Master Leighson was delivered bag and baggage (including dressing-case and hat-box), at Ridingdale Hall.

He could not complain of his welcome, but before the day was over he managed to complain of everything else. In her kindness Mrs. Ridingdale thought he was grieving for his mother; he quickly undeceived her. Later, in the presence of two of the boys, Arthur used language about his own mother that sent away Harry and Lance with

scared faces and wondering eyes. His first little altercation was with Hilary.

"I'll show you your room," Hilary said cheerily when the clock struck nine, and though the rest had all retired Arthur kept the easy-chair he had appropriated.

"Thanks. I don't go to bed at nine o'clock. I always sit up."

"You can sit up all night," laughed Hilary, "but it will have to be in bed."

Good-naturedly, but with a firm grip, Hilary lifted him up and threw him over his shoulder. Going upstairs, Arthur kicked a good deal and used language that Hilary may, or may not, have heard in the street; but when the visitor called him a "putrid bully," the Squire's eldest son was not pleased.

"You may not know that your uncle has asked us to give him a report of your conduct," said Hilary, standing the boy on his feet, "and particularly of your language. What you've just said to me, and what I overheard you say to my brothers, I'll pass over this time. You are a bit upset, and no wonder. We're all awfully sorry, and we're all anxious to be nice with you in every way; but, though we can stand as much decent slang as most boys, we draw the line at gutter-language. I'm sure you understand."

Arthur looked a little ashamed, and perhaps a little frightened, but he said nothing.

The next morning, when the boys were polishing their

clogs, Hilary and Harry held a whispered consultation regarding Arthur.

"He's not down yet, I'm pretty sure," said the former; "but, of course, it's not a holyday of obligation. Anyhow, I won't bother him this morning. Father will settle all these things, no doubt. He said that for the present we were to look upon Arthur as a guest."

"And some guests like to be left alone, don't they?" asked Harry.

"'Course they do. 'Tisn't hard to leave some people alone. He'll turn down for breakfast, no doubt."

It was an unwritten rule of the house not to talk freely and unnecessarily before Mass, so no more was said until the boys were returning from church. Even then, though they were all thinking of Arthur, they did not venture to discuss him at any great length. When people lead active and useful, and therefore happy lives, you generally find that they talk less of persons than of things. And the number of delightful *things* the Ridingdale boys had to talk about was considerable. Moreover, it was holiday time, and they were as careful of their six weeks' as was Pippa of her twelve hours' treasure.

When the big merry party sat down to breakfast no Arthur had put in an appearance; but again there was so much to discuss, such a wealth of work and play to arrange for, that Arthur might have been forgotten if Mrs. Ridingdale had not mentioned his name.

"I think, Hilary," she said, "you may run upstairs and see if Arthur is getting up. Perhaps we forgot to tell him that breakfast is always at a quarter-past eight."

Hilary found the guest fully dressed, sitting in an easy chair and reading a copy of some evening paper. He had been given a bed-room usually reserved for visitors, and Hilary at once detected the smell of tobacco — a little stale, and suggesting an overnight consumption of cigarettes. The big boy also noticed that the bath he himself had prepared for Arthur had not been used. Hilary made no comment, but remarked that breakfast was half over.

"This is a county house, ain't it?" Arthur inquired.

"Very much so," smiled Hilary.

"Well, I've heard ma say that in country houses people always have breakfast in their bed-rooms: in bed, if they like."

"They don't do it at Riddingdale Hall," said Hilary.

Arthur yawned — rather rudely thought the other boy.

"Want me to come down, I s'pose?"

"I think you'd better," Hilary answered.

The peal of laughter heard by the late-comer as he entered the dining-room had of course no reference to him; it had been raised by one of Harry's original conundrums. But it so entirely coincided with Arthur's entry that perhaps he may be forgiven for thinking that it was intended as a greeting. Both the Squire and his wife reassured him, and spoke to him with affectionate kindness. However, his

first remark caused one of those momentary silences which are described as uncomfortable.

"You can take this poultice stuff away," he said to Sarah, who had just set before him some fresh porridge and hot milk. "I'll have ham and eggs."

Sarah looked appealingly at her mistress.

"Will you kindly ask Jane to cook some rashers and eggs," said Mrs. Ridingdale quietly. "I am afraid we have no ham just now," she added turning to Arthur.

"Oh, it'll be all right if the bacon's hammy," said the boy coolly, while five other boys hurt themselves a good deal in suppressing their laughter. Harry made a silent appeal to his mother for leave to retire, and as he and George and Lance and Alfie had finished they rose.

Mr. Ridingdale was looking at his letters and passing them one by one to his wife. There was a note from the Colonel, and its contents amused them not a little. That good man was going to London, he said, but would be back in three days' time, or less. Meanwhile, he hoped the Squire would treat Arthur — "not as a guest, but as a boy among boys."

Hilary, Gareth, Maggie, and Connie now left the table, soon followed by their father, who went out to smoke a pipe on the lawn. Arthur seemed disposed to linger over his bacon and eggs, and in her happy way Mrs. Ridingdale tried to chat with him; but she who could always put both great and small people at their ease had little success with the Colonel's nephew.



II.

QUIETLY pacing the lawn in great enjoyment of his pipe and a volume of Milton, the Squire was fully conscious that a more than usually enthusiastic meeting was being held in Sniggery. True to his invariable practice, he kept well out of hearing of anything but an indistinct echo of boys' voices. He knew his sons and could trust them. He knew also that if they wanted his help they would come to him.

As a matter of fact, Hilary was watching his father closely, and waiting for the moment when the book would be pocketed, and the ashes knocked from the pipe: for though the Squire had never forbidden the lads to interrupt that after-breakfast quarter of an hour, they all instinctively respected it. Indeed, on Sundays and holidays when father did not at once retire to his study, the end of his morning literary snack, as he called it, was the signal for his immediate capture and detention — either in Sniggery or Snuggery.

“It's about Arthur, father,” said Hilary running up as Mr. Ridingdale closed his book. “Would you like us to take him anywhere, or do anything special for him? You see, father, we'd made our programme for the day, but of course we'll change it if you think we ought.”

The Squire took the proffered programme and glanced at it smilingly.

“It seems very full, Hillie, but quite satisfactory. It includes lawn-mowing, rolling, rehearsal of play, cricket, tennis, rowing and swimming: and plenty of each. Perhaps as this is Arthur’s first full day with you you might leave out the lawn-mowing and the rolling of the cricket-pitch: unless they are quite necessary.”

“Well, that’s just it, father; I’m afraid they are. What with the Colonel’s party and the two matches, we’ve lost a working day or two lately. The pitch wants rolling awfully badly, and as for the lawn — well,” said Hilary, rubbing his clogged feet over the grass, “you can see for yourself, father.”

“All right, my dear: stick to your programme by all means. Probably Arthur will like to help you in something. If he doesn’t, he’ll be able to look after himself. Don’t work too long or too hard, Hillie.”

Hilary went back to Sniggery with a queer sort of smile on his ruddy face. He thought it clear that his father did not yet know much of Arthur. Ought he, Hilary, to have spoken of the bed-room smoking? He fancied not. For him and his brothers smoking was a penal offence; but then Arthur was a guest. As for the neglect of the bath, well that couldn’t be spoken of — to anybody. Hilary had a hazy recollection of somebody in the nursery having once objected to his bath, but he was quite sure that the somebody had not then reached the age of reason.

It may be doubted if Hilary could have told his father

any one thing concerning Arthur that Mr. Ridingle did not already know. Even as he passed through the house into his study the Squire was wondering if it would not be better at once to relieve the young guest of his stock of cigarettes. A long chat to-day with the Colonel had been counted upon by Arthur's host; he was sorry that the great-uncle was not available. A settled policy in regard to the treatment of the stranger was most necessary. It was all very well for the Colonel to write, "treat him as a boy among boys:" but what did that imply? The Squire knew by experience that his old friend did not always mean what he said.

"Better let the boy be regarded as a privileged guest during these three days," the Squire said to himself as he sat down to his writing-table. "A spoilt child may sometimes be worth more consideration than his spoiler."

Lawn-mowing is no trifle when you have to deal with a great area of grass like that which lies between the Hall and its kitchen-gardens. Two machines, however, were in motion before the clock struck nine, and an hour later when Arthur made his appearance on the terrace he stood watching two couples of very hot-looking boys, trying, and succeeding, in getting some fun out of what was in reality rather hard work. Disgust and discretion kept the visitor at a safe distance from Harry and George and Lance and Alfie, and after looking about him idly for a few minutes, Arthur went back into the house and sought his bed-room.

Looking through his window into the park, he saw Hilary driving the pony that was pulling the big roller. Arthur's remark need not be set down here.

Work made a big hole in the boys' morning, for when they had finished the lawn they were surprised to find that it was half-past eleven, and that Sarah was carrying to Sniggery a huge jug of milk and some slices of currant-loaf. Hilary was already sitting there. Laughing and cheering, the rosy and voluble lads crowded about the good housemaid and toasted her in glasses of new and creamy milk.

"What has Master Arthur done with himself, Sarah?" they demanded.

Sarah sniffed. It was her one bad habit. Also, its exercise was a bad sign. When Sarah sniffed she always followed it up by speaking in the style condemned by Hamlet:

Pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
As, "Well, we know;" or, "We could, an if we would;"
Or, "If we list to speak;" or, "There be, and if there might:"
Or such ambiguous giving out.

This morning Sarah sniffed twice, and then her immediate reply did not seem to be quite to the point. It was to the effect that "if some people was so high and mighty that they treated you like the dirt under their feet, they should take a valet about with 'em. That's all *she'd* got to say." And with another sniff, she went back to the house.

“Well,” said Lance, “if he’s offended Sarah, he’s just been and gone and done it; that’s all *I* can say.”

“I hope he hasn’t been really rude to her,” George remarked.

“If he has, he’ll hear about it,” Hilary put in — rather sharply.

“How long is he going to stop?” asked Alfie, counting the remaining pieces of cake.

“Hush!” whispered Lance. “He’s coming.”

“Smelt the cake and milk, the beggar!” Harry suggested.

Alfie re-counted the remaining slices of currant-bread, and sighed. He was the youngest of the five — now increased to six.

“Hello, you chaps!” began Arthur, as he swaggered into Sniggery. “Finished that navvy business, eh?”

“If you mean the lawn-mowing,” Hilary answered quietly, “why, yes. Have some cake and milk? We’ll soon get another glass. Alfie, run to the kitchen for a tumbler.”

“No, thanks; no stodge of that sort. That just is a shouting cake; my eye! I could hear it right across the lawn.”

It was too bad of Harry; but, unluckily, the Sniggery Shakespeare was lying open at *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, some scenes from which the boys intended to represent in a few days’ time. In his exaggeratedly comic way, Harry recited, as though reading to himself, the lines:

Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do slap,
And stick some thistles in thy sleek smooth head
And *box* thy fair large ears, ungentle chap.



Even Hilary jumped up hastily, and pretended to refer to the written programme of the day's doings fastened on the wall behind him. Lance made a sudden rush for the

open, and retired into the shrubbery, in order to laugh unseen. George was the only one of the five who managed to control his features and his voice, as he remarked — with a deep blush — “I’m glad Harry reminded us of the rehearsal; it’s nearly time for it; isn’t it, Hillie?”

Harry was still bending over the well-worn copy of Shakespeare, as though seeking for another passage that might lend itself to adaptation. No one had dared to look at Arthur — now half-way across the lawn. To say that he was deeply offended, expresses his condition of mind very feebly.

“Too bad, Harry,” declared Hilary.

“Too bad of him, you mean?”

“No, of you. We ought to draw the line at personalities. He’s probably sensitive on the points of ears,” Hilary said.

“Anything the matter with his ears?” asked Harry.

“Don’t humbug. And when you apologize to him don’t, for goodness sake, say you hadn’t noticed that he had such big ears.”

“Hillie! Hillie!” shrieked Harry, holding his sides, “don’t be as funny as you can. Remember the chap in Holmes’ verses. But, I say” — Harry became suddenly sober — “I really hadn’t noticed his ears; honour bright! I was only thinking of his long *hearing*. You know he said he could hear this cake shouting when he was at the other end of the lawn.”

“His ears wouldn’t be nearly so prominent if his hair

wasn't cut so short, and in such a fantastic style," Hilary said; "but I should say that if he has a sore point ——"

"After Lannie's boxing 'em the other day," Harry interrupted.

"Didn't mean that. We mustn't hurt his feelings, you know."

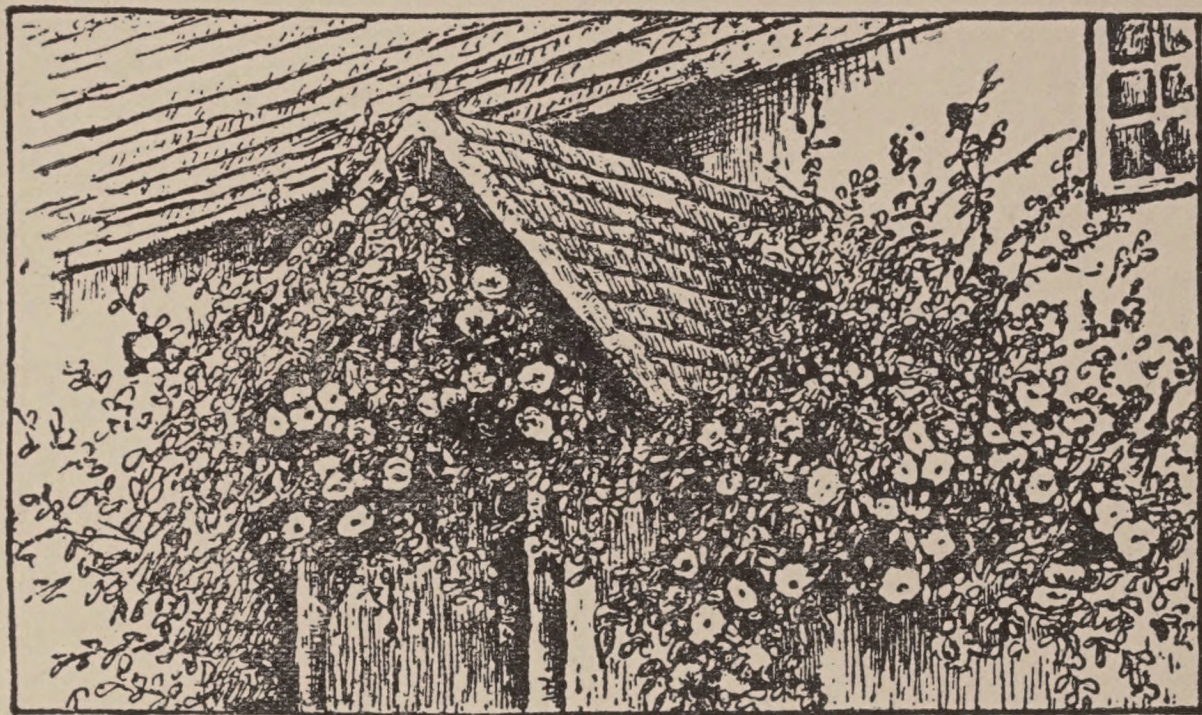
"Of course I'll apologize. But he's no right to abuse our mother's cake."

"'Course he hasn't," chimed in Alfie, who was finishing the last slice. "He called it stodge."

"Time for the rehearsal, isn't it?" asked Lance, putting his head into Sniggery. "Don't think I can go through my songs for laughing. I say, Harry! How can you?"

For the incorrigible one, having made sure that Arthur had disappeared, was singing to himself:

I know it's not a sin
For me to sit and grin,
At him *theer*.
But the bumptious little brat
In the chimney-potter hat,
Is so queer.



III.

For the *al fresco* entertainment they had chosen a delightful corner of the lawn, a veritable fairy grot, with a mossy bank and no lack of musk-roses. Mignonette did duty for wild thyme, and “flowers of every hue, their queen the bashful rose,” took the place of oxlips and violets. Needless to say, this outdoor stage was the scene of to-day’s rehearsal.

In adapting Shakespeare to their own limitations and requirements the boys had made short work of the two couples of mortal lovers, retaining only the pretty fairy scenes and the comicalities of Quince, Snug, Bottom, and their companions. Indeed, they had made havoc of “the book,” and with the best possible results. Somebody has boasted that Shakespeare never blotted a line; Ben Jonson

said he ought to have blotted a thousand. Ben's estimate was a modest one. Those who read Shakespeare's plays, instead of reading about them, would cheerfully dispense with more than a thousand lines.

I say this because some of the boys had now and again been disturbed by what they found in an author so highly regarded by their elders, and in plays that they were encouraged to read and study.

"It is always better to face facts than to blink them," their father had said. "In some authors — classical authors, too — there is more bad than good. These we refuse to read. In Shakespeare, though there is much that no Christian can defend, there is very much more that is good and wise and beautiful, and therefore fit for mental food. We reject the bad, just as in this basket of fruit" — he pointed to a quantity of strawberries he had brought into Sniggery — "you will throw away the over-ripe, the grub-eaten, and the rotten. By far the greater part of the best literature in the world has to be treated in this way. In some ways books are like men. In this life we can't hope to be entirely surrounded by saints; but a thoroughly vicious man or boy, like a completely bad book, we can always keep at arm's length. The average man will have his good qualities. We must make the most of them, even while we silently disapprove of what is bad in him."

Although Tommie Lethers and one or two other "children of the choir" were helping, some of the parts had to be doubled, and, as usual, Lance found himself with plenty

to do. Every portion of the play for which they could find music was sung, and Lance had not only to assume the character of Puck and sing all the songs of that engaging sprite, but also to take part in "Ye Spotted Snakes," with its lullaby chorus, and the famous duet, "I know a Bank whereon the Wild Thyme grows."

There was no mistaking Harry's enjoyment of his part as the weaver, and Hilary made an excellent Quince — though his sense of humour was not equal to that of his brother. George was Oberon, and mingled his mellow contralto voice with Puck's delightful treble in a way that made even the actors applaud the duets.

Experience proved that outdoor rehearsals, however pleasant, did not tend to the saving of time. The spacious sunlit scene and the unwinged, uncurtained stage, backed only with flowers and shrubs, the soft turf under their feet — everything seemed to discount discipline and to increase the difficulty of prompter and call-boy. Even Tommie Lethers, usually so shy in the presence of the Squire's boys, seemed to become infected with the high spirits of Harry and Lance and Alfie, and it was only when Hilary threatened to transfer the rehearsal to Arts and Crafts that, in a measure, the general larkiness ceased.

It was fortunate perhaps that they were taking matters more soberly, for just as they were finishing the third act they noticed that they had an audience of two persons — their father and Arthur Leighson.

From his study-window the Squire had seen his young

guest moving about in an aimless, discontented sort of way. Leaving his work, Mr. Ridingdale had joined the lad and brought him to the scene of the rehearsal. They had walked only from the park to the lawn, but the Squire was still marvelling at the nature of some of Arthur's remarks.

"An outdoor play!" the boy had exclaimed when told of the rehearsal on the lawn. "That's rather a swagger thing, ain't it?"

"What do you happen to mean by 'a swagger thing'?" the Squire asked pleasantly.

Floundering somewhat in his reply, Arthur seemed to imply that by swagger he meant aristocratic. Mr. Ridingdale laughed.

"Don't you think, my boy, that a genuine aristocrat would be quite the last person in the world to *swagger* — eh? But I fail to see that there is anything specially aristocratic about an open-air play. By the way, what is your notion of an aristocrat?"

Arthur glanced at the tall, handsome man at his side, the host of whom he was beginning to be just a little afraid, and said desperately, "Well, you're one, ain't you?"

The Squire turned away his head — not to hide a blush but to conceal a very broad smile as he asked — "Is it my *swagger* that makes you think so?"

"Oh, no," answered the boy, looking uncomfortable, "but you're the son of a lord, ain't you?"

"Well, to be correct, the grandson," said Mr. Ridingdale; "but I'm glad you didn't find it out through my

swagger. Ah, here we are! Where have they got to, I wonder?"

It was not a dress rehearsal, though a few of the properties were lying about, and Harry in his character of Bottom had already assumed the ass's head — one that he declared he had made for the occasion entirely out of his own noddle.

"We're just in time for the fourth act," the Squire remarked to his companion.

"Pantomime, ain't it?" Arthur asked.

"Not exactly. If you listen, you'll recognize Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, you know."

"Oh!" ejaculated the boy, and began to wonder if he had not seen it at some one of the many music-halls with which he was familiar. He remembered now that his mother had called Shakespeare "heavy."

Suddenly he heard the lines that he thought had been addressed to himself that very morning in Sniggery. After all, he mused, Harry had not intended to refer to any ears but those of the donkey-headed person in the play. That, at any rate, was satisfactory. It was true that the lines he had just heard did not seem to be *quite* the same as those recited by Harry in Sniggery, but to a boy who could not have quoted a line of Shakespeare if his life had depended upon it, one version of Titania's speech was as good as another.

For the first time that morning Arthur laughed, and the Squire's opinion of him rose immediately. There is always

hope for a boy who laughs —honestly. Harry was certainly making the most of his part as the weaver transformed into an ass. The actors were now doing their best. When they came to the little trio which begins

Fairy King, attend and mark:
I do hear the morning lark —

Arthur could not but show that he was impressed by the exquisite harmony the three singers produced.

IV.

The afternoon programme consisted of a quiet row on the river, including a little luxurious sitting about either afloat or ashore — always with a favourite book under a shady tree — and a pleasant dip and swim before the boat-house tea. The two boats, *St. Stanislaus* and *St. Nicholas*, were not



built for racing purposes; but though in spring and autumn the boys could not always resist the temptation of trying their rowing skill one against another, in the hot summer weather they reserved their energies for swimming contests.

Arthur was, of course, to be included in the water-party, and though each of his companions was longing to ask him if he could swim, for some reason or other they all hesitated to put the question: perhaps they had an instinctive feeling that it would be answered in the negative. Moreover, since they all realized that not only was Arthur a guest but a

somewhat touchy one, and as courtesy was the last thing in the world in which they were deficient, they put the question by indefinitely.

At mother's suggestion they took down to the boats a goodly dessert of plums and, for Arthur's delectation, a small basket of apricots. George had begged to be excused for an hour or so. The next number of the overdue *Bow-Wow* was giving him pricks of conscience, and though it was understood that this pen-and-ink treasury of literature and art must not be expected to appear with absolute regularity, particularly during the months of summer, yet, as George said, there was a time-limit after all, and one that ought not to be exceeded. He would turn up at the boat-house at four o'clock, he promised, bringing with him the milk and buns and other materials for a four o'clocker.

As Hilary, Harry, Lance, and Alfie appeared on the terrace ready to start for the river, Arthur looked at them with amazement. They had removed their stockings and thrust their bare feet into low clogs. In their white flannel shirts and broad-brimmed straw hats they looked delightfully cool and fresh, and prepared for any amount of water-larking. Master Arthur Leighson seemed to be dressed for an evening party.

They greeted him with such effusive good-nature that, fortunately for everybody concerned, his opening question as to "Why the deuce they were looking so pleased with themselves?" was completely drowned. What with fruit and books and bathing toggery and towels, they were all

pretty well laden, but they did not dream of imposing any small burden upon their guest, and, needless to say, he did not offer to relieve them of anything.

“D’ye go this way to the river?” asked Arthur, as the party began to move across the lawn.

“Oh, yes,” laughed Harry, “we always make a bee-line for the water. Can’t coax our river to run uphill, somehow. We go through the kitchen garden, and then down the meadows that skirt our park on this side.”

“’Tisn’t far,” said Hilary encouragingly. “Down a couple of fields, and there we are.”

Hilary forgot the brook, for whichever way you take to the boat-house you must at some point or other cross that brook. And a very delightful thing it is to cross — when your bare feet are shod with clogs instead of drawing-room shoes.

“How the dickens am I to get through this?” Arthur inquired, as his companions began to splash across one of the prettiest rivulets in the Dale — one of those rippling, singing, hurrying brooks that seem always to be laughing to themselves and saying “look-sharp-and-let-us-get-to-the-river-as-fast-as-ever-we-can!”

“So sorry,” said Hilary apologetically; “I quite forgot. Never mind; come on!” And before Arthur had time to swear, or even to scream, Hilary had landed him safely on the other side of the brook.

“How beastly strong you are!” exclaimed Arthur as Hilary put him down; the dignity of the guest was hurt.

"Can't help it, you know," Hilary replied good-humouredly; "always have been. Born so, I suppose. Strength comes in handy now and then, don't you think?"

But with some anxiety Arthur was examining his thin shoes. He had unwittingly stepped into a puddle. There had been recent rain, and the grass was no drier than it ought to have been. It was all very well for these chaps in wooden shoes, he told himself, but — well he was beginning to wish himself elsewhere.

Yet the sight of the boat-house interested him. It was, in every sense of the word, a riverside Sniggery, furnished and decorated by the boys, and containing what Harry was pleased to call "a choice gallery of Young Masters"—a description of which belongs to quite another story. Indeed, Arthur showed a strong disposition to remain here while the others went for their row and swim; but when they reminded him that it was only about half-past two, and that tea would not be ready until four, or later, he somewhat unwillingly consented to go on board the *St. Nicholas*.

It had never occurred to them that Arthur would have any difficulty in getting into the boat. Hilary and the rest were so much at home in and on the water that, when they had launched their respective crafts, they just waded through the stream and clambered over the sides, taking off their clogs and throwing them beforehand into the boats. They were all seated before Hilary realized that Arthur was still standing on the bank looking with horror at the shallow strip of water that lay between himself and the boat.

“I’m so sorry,” exclaimed Hilary; “and we haven’t got a plank in either boat! However, I’ll bring her as near the bank as I can. It’s too shallow just here to pull her quite close to where you’re standing. Do you mind walking a few yards higher up?”

Hilary and Lance had charge of *St. Nicholas*, the bigger and heavier boat: Harry and Alfie were already ahead with *St. Stanislaus*. As soon as Hilary and Lance got their tub into rather deeper water, they began to hug the bank — anything but a high one.

It now became clear that Arthur was not in the habit of getting into boats. Twice he attempted, and failed, to step into *St. Nicholas*: the third time he meant to succeed. So he put one foot on the tub, and slowly pushed it away from the bank. Then he stepped into — the water!

Hilary had him out long before he could sink, but his screams were heard nearly a quarter of a mile away. To his reiterated remark that he might have been drowned, Hilary said at length that even if Arthur had tried he would hardly have succeeded. Trousers, socks, and shoes were of course dripping, but the upper part of his body was quite dry. It was such a hot afternoon that there was little danger of his catching cold; however, he was so certain he would “get his death” if he remained on the river that Hilary rowed back to the boat-house.

“We’ve lots of dry things in the shanty,” said Lance, as he landed with Arthur, leaving Hilary in the boat. “We always keep some clean stockings here and bathing-drawers

and — toggery. I'll give you the things, and while you're changing I'll get some wood for the stove; then I'll light a fire and dry your clothes. Sorry we've no slippers here, but, if you don't mind putting on clogs until your shoes are dry, there are two pairs in the cupboard."

When Lance returned with the sticks, he found Arthur looking with great disgust at the clogs, and evidently hesitating about putting them on.

"I say," he remarked as Lance set to work to make the fire, "I can't put my foot in a thing like this."

"Try the other pair," suggested Lance, "perhaps they are bigger."

Suspecting chaff, Arthur looked keenly at Lance, but the latter was fully occupied in trying to make the fire burn.

"'Tisn't that," snapped the guest, "they're a mile too big."

"Oh, then that's all right," remarked Lance, blowing away at the fire, "they won't pinch you."

"How *can* you fellows wear such things as these?" Arthur asked with some scorn, taking up one of the clogs and examining its iron-bound sole.

"What things?" demanded Lance. "Oh, you mean clogs?"

"Yes," said the other, "they're not the things for the sons of a gentleman to wear, you know."

"Aren't they?" asked Lance innocently: "well, you see, my father evidently thinks they are. We never wear anything else, you know, except in drawing-rooms."

Arthur blushed a little and made some show of putting his foot into one of the clogs.

“Better try a bigger pair,” Lance suggested, seeing that Arthur could not get his heel into the clog.

“It’s these frightfully thick stockings, I expect,” said Master Leighson, fearful of having to admit that his foot was bigger than Lance’s.

“Very likely,” Lance admitted, seeing now exactly what was in the other’s mind. “These are George’s: try them.”

At length, with a wry face, Arthur put on the clogs — scarcely a bit too big for him — and proceeded to walk gingerly across the boat-house floor.

“They’re not quite so heavy as I thought they would be,” he admitted.

“They are not nearly so heavy as a shooting boot,” said Lance, “or as an ordinary boot — when it’s wet. The clog sole is made of ever such light wood, and the iron hardly counts. Hilary goes to Lord Dalesworth’s for the shooting, so he’s obliged to get a pair of boots; well, he’s weighed them against his clogs, and he finds that the boots are ever so much heavier.”

“Lord Dalesworth’s your uncle, ain’t he?”

“My father’s uncle, yes,” replied Lance, “and so ——”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Arthur suddenly, “there’s somebody coming! and I’m not fit to be seen.”

“It’s only George,” suggested Lance, going to the boat-house door.

“There’s a lady, I’ll swear I heard her voice.”

“ Hurrah ! ” shouted Lance, “ then it’s mother — perhaps father. They’ve come to tea. This is glorious ! ”

“ What on earth am *I* to do ? ” asked Arthur piteously.

“ You’re all right. You’ve only to lie low. They won’t have tea in here. We shall picnic on the river bank: perhaps in one of the boats. Do excuse me for a moment: I must take mother a chair.”

A more comical picture of misery than Arthur Leighson could not be imagined. In spite of Lance’s assurance to the contrary, the guest was in deadly fear lest Mr. and Mrs. Ridingdale should climb the boat-house stairs and see him in his nondescript costume. His trousers were already drying at the stove, but to his horror he noticed that his cheap and nasty patent-leathers were reduced to the condition of pulp. He greatly doubted if he would ever be able to wear them again. Even before he found himself in the river, he had stepped into many wet and muddy places, and the cardboard horrors he called shoes had been seriously damaged.





V.

MEANWHILE the boys had returned from their expedition up the river, and were all engaged in laying out a picnic tea on the grassy bank close to the boat-house stairs. Lance clattered upstairs with a kettle of water which he put on the stove to boil; then, with an apology to Arthur, he dashed down again with a pile of cups and saucers. The busy merriment below was delightful. George had brought not

only milk, but tea and cake, bread and butter. Congratulating himself upon the fact that the upper part of his person was fashionably clad, Arthur ventured to peep through the boat-house window. He admitted to himself that the sight was a pretty one.

"They just seem to worship their mother," he said to himself, as he watched them, enviously, "and their dad too, for that matter."

His desire to join the family circle became keen. The stove was beginning to make the boat-house uncomfortably hot, for Lance had built a roaring fire. There was comfort in the fact that the wet toggery would soon be dry — all but the shoes. Arthur began to understand the utility of knickerbockers and stockingless feet in clogs.

"I won't let the others see you," said Lance rushing again into the boat-house for more *things*. "I told mother we were drying some clothes, and that you'd rather be alone for a bit. You would — wouldn't you?"

"O yes; for heaven's sake don't let anybody see me!"

"Well, I'll bring you some tea. These apricots are for you: we brought them on purpose. Hope you like 'em?"

"Don't I! You'll see!" And he began to demolish them forthwith.

Below, everybody seemed to be laughing and talking at once. Now and again Arthur heard the tum-tum of some stringed instrument: the thought came to him that if these people had not met one another for a year they could hardly have shown more delight. Presently, Lance

ran upstairs again with tea and cake. Arthur's apricots had vanished.

"What time is dinner?" asked the guest.

"Dinner!" exclaimed the astonished Lance. "Oh, I beg your pardon; I forgot. At your uncle's you dine in the evening, of course. Well, you know we've had it; we always have dinner at one o'clock. Supper is at eight."

Arthur stared, but said nothing. The fruit had given him an appetite for tea. He had not finished when the tum-tum of George's mandolin began again, and Lance's voice was heard in a quaint old English song which to one listener at least was very new indeed:

O for a booke and a shadie nooke,
Eyther in-a-door or out;
With the grene leaves whispering overhede,
Or the streete cryes all about,
Where I may reade all at my ease
Both of the newe and olde;
For a jollie good booke whereon to looke,
Is better to me than golde.

The most thoughtless people do a little thinking now and then, particularly when they find themselves quite alone and with nothing else to do. Having finished his tea, Arthur was unoccupied. He was of the number who do not think — if they can help it. Thoughts, many and puzzling thoughts, were trying to press themselves upon his attention. Such as it was, his philosophy was at fault. The two main principles of his life — to be smart, and to know smart people — did not at this moment seem to recommend

themselves quite so much as usual. To him, religion was a negligible quantity. His nominally Catholic mother had sent him to many different schools; not one of them had been Catholic. Except that of Baptism, he had received no Sacrament of the Church.

Religion, then, did not enter into his thoughts, but as he glanced down from time to time upon the merry group on the river-bank, it suddenly occurred to him that these people — who ought to have been smart, but were not — were altogether the happiest he had ever met. As he put it to himself, “These chaps were having a jolly good time.” Moreover, they *always* seemed to be having a good time. This appealed to Arthur Leighson; this at any rate he could understand — and long for. Yet he was out of it, he told himself, not merely at this moment, but generally, and that very largely through his own fault. He did not like the idea a bit, and determined not to dwell upon it, but he was beginning to have a suspicion that he was a coward. He could do nothing — but dress and smoke and swear. The first of these things the Riddingdales were completely indifferent to; the second and third they altogether tabooed. In this new environment Arthur’s self-complacency was constantly being disturbed. Perhaps no one — not even his own mother, alas! — had ever thought much of him, but he had always approved of himself. The self-conceited and self-conscious are supposed to be independent of their neighbour’s approval; they are the people who crave it most.

There was a sudden general movement below, and looking from the window, Arthur saw that Mr. and Mrs. Ridgdale were getting into one of the boats. On the bank itself, a generous altercation was going on between George and Lance. The latter wanted to remain behind and clear away the tea-things; George was saying that, through Arthur's accident, Lance had missed his swim — had, moreover, been running about after various people most of the afternoon. Lance reminded George that he had been writing all the afternoon, and that he ought to go up the river. Harry settled the matter by hauling off George to *St. Stanislaus*, and by dropping Lance bodily into *St. Nicholas*. There was a peal of laughter, a splash of oars, and both boats were in motion. Down the river came a chorus of treble voices:

Row, row, onward we row,
Song lightens our labour;
Row, row, sing as we go,
Keep each with his neighbour.

With an exclamation that I need not record, Arthur turned away from the window. He was a little afraid of most of the boys, but, curiously enough, the one he dreaded most was Harry. For the guest was sadly wanting in the sense of humour, and to him this perpetually-laughing and joking Harry was a trial — chiefly, no doubt, because Arthur feared that he himself was sometimes the cause of the other's laughter.

Fortunately, the trousers were now quite dry, so that he

was saved the humiliation of appearing before Harry in an incongruous costume; but the shoes were still so much wet rag and paper. Arthur had scarcely changed when Harry knocked at the door.

“I needn’t come in, you know,” began the laughing one; “but, if you don’t mind me just shoving these cups and things inside. There! thanks very much. Anything I can do for you?”

“O come in,” said Arthur. “I want to get out of this. It’s so beastly hot.”

“Well,” laughed Harry, “a big fire in a small room on a hot day does make for heat — doesn’t it? But you are all right now?”

“Except for my shoes,” said the rueful guest, handling one of them gingerly. “They don’t seem to get a bit drier.”

“Stuff of this sort doesn’t dry in a hurry,” remarked Harry, as he examined one of the shoes. “You see, the sole was broken a bit; so of course the mud and the water have got well into it. Fact, I think you might as well pitch ’em into the river at once.”

“How am I to get home?” demanded the thoroughly exasperated Arthur.

Harry composed his face, and pretended to be thinking deeply; no doubt he was. Twice he opened his mouth to speak, and twice he refrained.

“Afraid we can’t very well get a carriage down these meadows,” he said at length, musingly. He thought of

adding: "If you did walk up the field in clogs, you'd probably survive it."

But reverencing the custom of his house, Harry from very courtesy forbore.

"I've got another pair of shoes in my bed-room," Arthur suggested.



"All right," said Harry, looking more thoughtful than ever; "I'll go and fetch them for you."

And without another word he went.

.

It really seemed as though disaster had marked Arthur Leighson for her own. The boating and swimming party had returned, and the boys at once made a rush for home. They badly wanted some cricket practice. The brook had

to be crossed again, and Master Leighson was now determined not to be subjected to the indignity of being carried over it by Hilary or anybody else.

“Mother always crosses just here,” Lance said, as they came to a part where lay some broad stepping-stones. “We generally jump it — a bit higher up. It’s not at all broad.”

“Oh, I’ll jump it all right,” said Arthur, hurrying on. “You go first, and I’ll follow you.”

Arriving at the place, Lance took a running leap across the water, followed by his brothers. Not to embarrass their guest, the boys did not turn round to see him jump — until they heard a splash and a shriek. Looking back, they saw Arthur lying full length in the brook!

Harry and Lance pretended not to notice the catastrophe, for Hilary and George had already run to Arthur’s help.

“Let us get somewhere where we can smile unseen,” said Harry, starting to run. “We’re not wanted here, you know.”

“Yes,” spluttered Lance, “if I don’t laugh out loud, I shall hurt myself.”

VI.

That night, at Slipper-time on the lawn, the guest did not appear. He had gone to bed, and a complete suit of Etons was drying at the kitchen fire. No part of him was hurt, except his temper: that was rather seriously damaged. In the circumstances Mrs. Ridingle thought every allowance ought to be made; needless to say, every allowance was made. A dainty little supper was sent up to him, together with a volume of *Punch* and other delightful picture-books. But why Sarah should have chosen that night of all others to give a month's warning, Mrs. Ridingle could not understand — at the time.

Thus ended the second day of Arthur Leighson's visit to Ridingle Hall.

Mrs. Ridingle thought it the most natural thing in the world that Arthur should have his breakfast in bed. She visited him herself, and suggested that he need not hurry to get up — a suggestion that he acted upon by rising at noonday.



But at dinner-time he was missing! Nobody had seen him go out, nobody knew his whereabouts. Jane had taken up his clothes and shoes — Sarah positively refused to go near him — and the said clothes and shoes, together with the tall hat, had disappeared. The boys thought he had in desperation run away; their father and mother did not think so.

As a matter of fact, the young man was at that very moment causing a certain amount of excitement at his uncle's house by demanding luncheon, and showing a fixed determination to get it. He assured the Colonel's housekeeper that the grub at the Hall was not fit to eat; that on the day before he had not had a morsel of dinner; that he was almost dying of hunger.

Very unwillingly, and with many misgivings as to what the Colonel would say when he heard of this unexpected invasion, she gave him a cold, but plentiful luncheon, and Arthur proceeded to enjoy it leisurely — not to say lengthily.

He was a little late in beginning, for he had arrived at the Chantry just as the servants were sitting down to dinner, and in their master's absence they were not at all disposed to be either disturbed or hustled.

However, by three o'clock he had satisfied his hunger, had bribed the stable-boy to get him some cigarettes, and was sitting smoking under a shady tree on the lawn, when — well, when the, to him, most unexpected thing in the world brought him to his feet and sent the hot blood

coursing through every vein in his body. *His uncle was driving up the avenue!*

It was well perhaps that Arthur did not yield to his first impulse and run away: if he had done so, he would have been brought back ignominiously. For, of course, the groom had already told his master that "Master Arthur was a-waiting to see him," and that "Master Arthur had ordered lunch, unexpected."

I am sorry to record it because it is a form of punishment greatly to be deprecated, but the Colonel's greeting of his nephew took the form of two smart boxes on each ear. Perhaps the cigarette, now lying smoking at the boy's feet, partly accounted for this very warm reception.

Then uncle and nephew went indoors, and it became the latter's fate to answer, or try to answer, more questions than had ever been put to him before on any one occasion.

Before the day was over, various other people had to stand the fire of the Colonel's interrogations: he wanted to know — well, practically everything that Arthur had done and said since his stay at the Hall. Every one of the boys was examined separately, but it was only when the Colonel assured them that their silence, rather than their speech, would damage Arthur's prospects for life that they consented to answer. He had already interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Riddingdale.

"I shall never forget the next day," said Harry, who told me the whole story. "Arthur was completely subdued, as you may imagine, and awfully afraid of what

might happen to him. The Colonel had asked my father to begin by giving Master Leighson a good birching; father wouldn't hear of that. Then the Colonel said he'd do it himself — he's one of those people who don't believe in flogging, you know — but of course he didn't. He asked his groom if he would mind doing it, but the man seemed so pleased with the idea that his master was afraid he'd lay on too hard. So Arthur escaped.

“Next day Hilary and I had to take him down to the Chantry after breakfast and get the money from the Colonel for Arthur's new rig-out. Of course he went with us like a lamb. He was awfully subdued, not a bit like the chap he had been the day before. We thought that the Colonel had frightened him, and so he had; but just then we did not know everything.

“Well, we got him a very decent suit of ready-made tweeds at Rups — Norfolk-jacket and knickerbockers and all that, and he seemed almost pleased to have them. But when we left the shop, and Hilary remarked that ‘We'd better get the clogs next,’ Arthur looked at us with horror. He turned quite pale and said, ‘He's not *really* going to make me wear clogs, is he?’ Hilary could only say that he'd been told to get him two pairs of clogs, one of the ordinary kind and a lace-up pair. Arthur began to blubber in the street, and we had to wait about ever such a time before he was fit to go into the clog-shop. However, he kept a straight lip while he was being fitted, but he cried again as we were going back to the Chantry. We did our

best to cheer him up, and told him that he'd feel ever so jolly once he got used to his clogs, and would never want to wear anything else out of doors.

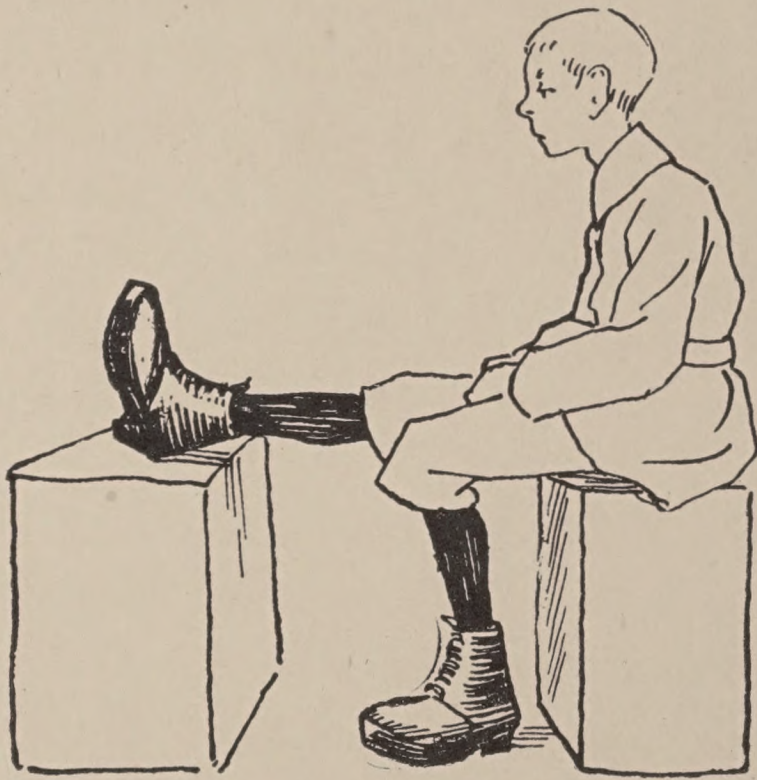
"By the time we got back to the Colonel's the new suit had been handed in: the clogs Hilary and I brought with us. So the Colonel ordered Arthur to change his Etons and get into the new toggery at once. But we were an awful time getting home. Our friend pretended that he couldn't walk in his new clogs. We told him to take his own time, and he did. He walked just like a cat on hot bricks, but we didn't laugh at him, of course. We found out afterwards that his feet were sore through wearing thin and tight shoes.

"However, he hadn't any shoes now. The Colonel had made him leave them and his Eton suit at the Chantry, for the present.

"He really did look funny in his new clothes. Perhaps they were just a bit too big for him: certainly his clogs seemed enormous — about twice as big as Lannie's; yet Hilary had bought the very smallest pair that Arthur could get his foot into. Of course having a big foot and very thin legs is no disgrace to a chap, and only a cad would ever chaff a fellow about things of that sort; but we were all glad when Hilary suggested to the Colonel that Arthur would be happier in trousers than in knickerbockers.

"For the first day or two we could scarcely get him out of doors. He used to keep by himself in Arts and Crafts when we were out, and just moon. One day I found him

sitting there with one foot up on a box, looking so wofully at his big lace-up clog that if I hadn't shut the door very quickly and made a rush, he would have seen me explode. We had all agreed that we would never laugh at him, however comical he might look, or whatever he might do. Not only that, but Hilary said we were not to chaff him in the way we often chaff one another, because he was very sore just then and not in a position to see a joke, however



harmless. It was rather hard work for all of us. To make matters worse, on that day the Colonel came home Arthur had been to the barber — though even then his hair was about as short as it could be; but now — well, I assure you, no prison crop in this world could have been closer than Arthur's.

“Well, as you know, Arthur stayed with us till after

Christmas. He really did improve a lot: but I must say that though we all tried hard to be very kind to him — he told us afterwards we had been awfully good, and I could see he meant it — somehow or other he never became one of us. We could not take to him really, and that's a fact. Yet, you know, all that time we never dreamt that he was not really the Colonel's nephew."

"But wasn't he?" I asked in great astonishment.

"Not a bit of it. His mother had lied to him about his age, or the Colonel, who had been suspicious all along, would have found it out before. Instead of being eleven, he was nearly thirteen. His mother was a widow when she married the Colonel's nephew, and Arthur was a son of the first husband, who was a clerk of some sort. We often thought young Leighson must be older than he pretended to be, but we never said so either to him or to the Colonel.

"The Colonel behaved very decently, considering: in fact, it seemed a sort of relief to him when he found that Arthur did not belong to his family.

"But of course there was a tremendous shindy at the time. The Colonel told Arthur that he was a fraud, and that he'd been guilty of false pretences and things of that sort. We really were sorry for the poor chap that day. He was in an awful state, quite expecting that he would be taken up and sent to prison; for the Colonel had him locked up in the tool-house and said he was going to fetch the police. Just at the time I think he really meant it, but when my father and mother began to talk to him he got a

bit calmer, and after a time he saw that there were heaps of reasons why young Leighson should not be prosecuted. Lannie was awfully good to Arthur that day."

"And what became of the boy?" I asked.

"Oh, the Colonel sent him off to some nice Catholic orphanage — I forgot where. He never comes to Ridingdale. The Colonel goes to see him now and again, and is very kind to him. The orphanage people say that his conduct has steadily improved, and he is just going to be apprenticed to a trade. The other day he sent the Colonel his portrait, in a group. He's with a jolly-looking lot of fellows, all in good corduroy suits and hob-nailed boots, which I bet Master Arthur finds twice as heavy as the clogs he made such a fuss about at Ridingdale. Lance hears from him now and then. He liked Lance — most people do — but he couldn't stand Hilary and me. Lance was mighty good to him up to the very last. My brother has never said so, but I'm pretty sure he taught Arthur how to say his prayers. I know he helped him an awful lot in all sorts of ways; so did George. Yes, it was a rummy business. Since then — let's see, it must be nearly three years ago — yes, three years next Christmas — we've had very few of the Colonel's nephews down here; I mean, you know, even of the genuine article. Between you and me," said Harry, lowering his voice, "I think the Colonel's getting a bit shy of them."

"And Sarah did not leave you after all?"

"Not she," laughed Harry.



LANCE'S BIG TEMPTATION



LANCE'S BIG TEMPTATION.

How Mr. Kittleshot, the mill-owner and reputed millionaire, first became acquainted with the Riddingdales has already been related: so also has the story of his conversion to the Catholic Church. We have heard too of the realization of his great scheme for a Secondary School on sound, if somewhat original, lines. In these days it is not only fully "recognized" but has become a great educational force. Its character is unique. It is a free Catholic School for the sons of poor gentlemen: neither boarder nor day-boy pays any fee whatsoever. Its Visitor and the head of its governing board is the Bishop of the diocese: its Rector is Father Horbury. Its masters are all graduates of Oxford and Cambridge. Without being in any sense of the word a Choir School it pays great attention to music.

Naturally enough, it is not able to receive every boy for whom application is made. Waiting or disappointed parents have been heard to say that it is much easier to get into the

French Academy than into the Riddingdale High School; big as the building is, it can only accommodate a certain number.

In any new educational establishment the first term is a somewhat anxious time for the masters. As yet they have no traditions: these have to be created, and thoughtful folk always shrink from the making of a tradition. Happily for them, the four Oxford men — five, if we count Father Horbury — who made up the original teaching staff, found themselves confronted with very few real difficulties. For the first term they had not found the use of the birch necessary in any single case: in the second long term it was employed only once. Harry and Lance Riddingdale felt inclined to congratulate boys and masters — as well as themselves. Neither of them had a mind to be flogged at school. Both of them had been familiar with punishments of various kinds; but then, these had always been inflicted at home. For until the opening of Mr. Kittleshot's school, the Squire's boys had been educated privately, first by their parents, afterwards by Father Horbury and Dr. Byrse.

Of Hilary, George, and Willie, the Squire had no fear at all, and it cannot be said that he was anxious concerning Harry and Lance. He knew that they were full of good intentions and generous resolutions, and that if they could check their high spirits at necessary times and control their general tendency to create larks, all would be well.

The third term had now come. Hilary had gone to Oxford, and Harry found himself at the head of his brothers. He was in his seventeenth year, but, except in height,

he did not look his age: George, who was a year younger, might easily have been mistaken for the elder. Lance was over fourteen, nearly the same age as his foster-brother Willie Murrington.

In this life, temptation must be expected; it must also be met and fought. Without it we should become very flabby creatures: it is easy enough to be good when we are not tempted. Lance knew all about temptations. He had had his falls as well as his victories. The unexpected had occasionally surprised him: now and again circumstances had seemed to be against him. Those who have followed his history know something of his past faults and consequent sufferings.

During the past year he had been anything but faultless: yet even the Colonel had remarked upon Lance's steady improvement. He had a good character with his class-master, and with the school-staff generally. Father Horbury had already hinted that, after the Christmas holidays, Lance would receive a prefect's "toga" — the blue blouse which distinguished the boy-prefects from their white-bloused school-fellows. For after much discussion and controversy the governors of the school, while permitting both boarders and day-boys to wear their own clothes, had adopted the blouse as a kind of uniform. In the same way, every High School boy had either to wear the regulation clogs, or to get his ordinary boots soled with wood and iron. There was therefore no difference between the dress

of one boy and another except in the colour of the blouse.

Rabbiting would soon be coming on at the Hall, and Lance was particularly anxious to have a couple of ferrets of his own. Hearing of this, Jack Barson had begged from One-Eyed Jim two young specimens which, with his father's permission, Lance had accepted.

Going to school on a certain November morning, and intending to call for the ferrets on his way back to dinner, he met Jack carrying them to the Hall. Stopping to examine the ferrets, instead of allowing Jack to proceed, Lance put one within his blouse and, leaving the other in its bag, handed it to Gareth. At that moment, as he afterwards said, he was only actuated by the motive of saving Jack any further trouble or waste of his master's time.

Arrived at school, however, the temptation to have a little fun soon became great. To begin with, each boy found the wriggling, restless thing in his blouse somewhat of a distraction. Coming in a little late, they had taken their places in the Study-hall without any one guessing the nature of what they carried, and though they were sitting some distance apart, they could not forbear making signals to one another. But all might have been well if Gus Byrse had not been sitting just in front of Lance. An amiable dog was a terror to this town-bred, and rather conceited, youth. What would a ferret be? The temptation to experiment was too strong for Lance.

He had only intended, as soon as the master's attention was relaxed, merely to hold the beast over Gus's shoulder

and then withdraw it. Unfortunately, Master Byrce's scream was of such a piercing sort that the startled Lance nipped the ferret and was himself nipped in return. Then he dropped it, and in two seconds the entire room was in uproarious pursuit.

Most of them being country lads who knew all about such vermin, they began the ferret hunt with great goodwill and deafening noise, while a few frightened youngsters joined in the anguished screams of the Byrses with a shrillness and intensity that is supposed to belong to the other sex.

Gareth's opportunity came when the hunt was fast and furious and the noise was at its height. Slipping the other ferret from its bag he joined *con amore* in the chase.

The three masters and Dr. Byrse were powerless. After strenuous but futile efforts to check the hubbub, two of them joined in the hunt. Dr. Byrse left the school-room. Mr. Meredith looked on.

Then the cry arose, "There are two of 'em!" and the excitement increased ten-fold. Master Gus and his brother stood on a desk and screamed until their faces were purple. Two or three timorous boys managed to get outside.

Even the quiet George, though he was honestly trying to catch one of the ferrets, forgot himself, and led the cheering as the beast doubled and put itself at a safe distance from its pursuers.

Half an hour passed agreeably enough — to the boys, and then both ferrets were run to earth under the master's

heavy desk. There came a sudden pause and deep silence.

With great presence of mind Mr. Meredith, outwardly very calm, called out: "To your places, boys!" Every lad obeyed.

The sudden silence grew very painful, and several threatened explosions of mirth were successfully smothered.

"The boy who brought those ferrets into the room, will be good enough to see me at half-past twelve."

The master's tone was very quiet.

Now began Lance's temptation. You may think that he had already yielded to temptation: so he had; but the giving way to a desire to have a little fun was nothing to the fierce and overpowering thoughts that now assailed him. A whole host of temptations were upon him, and the worst was that, for a time, he did not see that he was being tempted. This is one of the saddest things that can happen to any one of us.

It was clear to Lance that Mr. Meredith took a very serious view of the escapade: it was natural that he should. The entire Study-hall had been upset; the whole discipline of the school set at nought; a most valuable part of the morning wasted. Somebody would be severely punished, and the tempter whispered that it should not, ought not, must not be Lance himself. A score of *apparently* excellent reasons why he should not own up, leapt into Lance's mind.

The first one was that only he and Gareth knew who were the real culprits. Nobody guessed that they had brought

the ferrets into the room. Not even Gus Byrse could be sure that the ferret had been held by Lance. The entire business had happened so quickly and so suddenly. Of course if Mr. Meredith put the question Lance would answer it truthfully; but why should he incriminate himself needlessly?

Again: Lance had been taught that the intention of an action was the really important thing. In his own mind he knew very well that he had not brought the ferrets into school in order to create a sensation. There had been a time in his life when a lark of that sort would have appealed to him irresistibly. Into the school-room at home he had often introduced the least desirable specimens of live stock. To-day, however, his leading motive had certainly been to save Jack Barson a walk to the Hall.

But the temptations that seemed to Lance simply overpowering were these:

If you discover yourself you will forfeit the good opinion of Mr. Meredith and the other masters.

If you are birched, you will lose your chance of a prefect's toga.

For you to be punished in this way will be a sort of scandal. You and your brothers are expected to give the tone to the whole school.

The matter will be heard of outside: whatever will the Guild boys think and say?

Fancy Tommie Lethers and his grandfather and grandmother hearing of your punishment!

You have just made an extra Communion for the Holy Souls, and you succeeded in getting one or two of your school-fellows to do the same: what will they think?

You are looked up to and liked by lots of people, and they fancy you are really good: what will they think of your conduct?

What will Father Horbury say?

Above all — what a trouble it will be to your mother!

These and a host of similar thoughts came to Lance as he sat at his desk and tried in vain to get on with his school-work: not clearly and one by one as I have put them down here, but in a confused crowd these questions of the Tempter rushed through his mind and made him almost incapable of reasoning quietly and connectedly.

Dread of the physical pain was not the least of his temptations. Though he was strong and healthy and had pluck enough for half a dozen boys of his age, he was one of those nervous, highly-strung lads to whom a flogging means so much more than to their duller and less delicately-organized companions. It seemed to Lance such a very long time since he had been punished in this way. It was well over a year, and to a boy in his early teens a year is an age. Moreover, to be whipped by a master was such a very different thing to getting birched at home. Father was always so very merciful in his use of the rod, so considerate and loving once the punishment was over; but the quiet, self-contained, somewhat stiff, and very athletic Mr. Meredith was a person in every way to be feared.

Surely this November morning was the longest on record! Fortunately, as regards their school-work all the boys were in the same box. They had all missed that quiet time of looking-over in the Study-hall; most of them went to the class-rooms unprepared. They would all miss the mid-morning half-hour's playtime: that had been anticipated, said Mr. Meredith, by the ferret hunt. In most of the class-rooms the boys were turned back and set to silent studies. Lance's tempter made the most of his opportunity.

The clock struck twelve: the *Angelus* was said aloud — slowly and reverently as the custom was. With burning cheeks and a throbbing head, Lance said it with the rest. In his own mind he had as yet come to no decision. He was still tempted by the devil. His good Angel had not left him, but within him the Tempter was raising such a storm that Lance could attend to nothing else.

A quarter-past twelve! Within the next fifteen minutes, the boy reminded himself, he must decide what course to take.

It seemed like an answer to the half-prayer that he was now making — though, of course, it was nothing of the kind. A servant entered the class-room and handed Mr. Meredith a card. Lance distinctly heard the master say, "Dear me, I'd forgotten that I made the appointment for a quarter-past twelve. Say I will come at once."

Leaving the boys to the care of a prefect, Mr. Meredith at once left the room. Lance could scarcely conceal his satisfaction. To him, this accidental circumstance looked

like a special providence. It seemed certain that Mr. Meredith would not return for the closing of morning schools.

He did not, and the moment the signal was given Lance sprang to his feet. Gareth was in another class-room of course, and Lance must see him at once. Whatever was done they must act together. Gareth's first words were not encouraging.

"I s'pose we'll both get it pretty hot, Lannie?"

"Let's get away, somewhere," suggested Lance. "We needn't let on to *everybody*."

Though they might immediately have found themselves on the way home they both wandered off to an empty class-room.

"Where's Poker?" asked the scared-looking younger brother: Poker, I am sorry to say, was Mr. Meredith's nick-name.

"Engaged," replied Lance.

"Got to wait for him, haven't we?"

Lance did not reply.

"Father Horbury came into our school this morning and had a talk with Cuffs." (This was the reprehensible way in which the boys spoke of Mr. Wytson — whose wristbands may have been a little exaggerated.) "Cuffs said that Poker was awfully angry, and that the chap who let the ferrets loose is safe for a twelver with the birch."

Lance twitched involuntarily, but said nothing. He was thinking — hard. Among other things he was thinking that at Gareth's age the matter was not quite so serious: he

would get off lightly. His younger brother was not at his ease, that was clear enough: at the same time, Lance could not but admire the other's attempt to take the affair coolly, and to assume the inevitableness, as well as the severity, of the punishment. Lance felt ashamed of himself.

"Look here," he said, "I don't see why you should figure in this business at all. Poker wouldn't birch you, of course; and unless he questions you I don't think you need be on in this scene. You didn't let the other beast loose on purpose, did you?"

"'Course I did!"

Lance was a little staggered, and showed it. The two boys looked at each other in silence — Gareth wearing what was meant to be a smile. Lance did not even attempt to smile. He was however just beginning to speak when he suddenly heard a footstep in the corridor outside.

"There's Poker!" exclaimed Gareth, paling somewhat.

Lance walked to the door — heavily, so that the click of his clogs might be distinctly heard. He did not want Mr. Meredith to think he was hiding. Opening the door and looking down the corridor, Lance saw — not his master but Mr. Wytson.

For an instant the boy drew back, but only for an instant.

"Don't you wait for me," he whispered to his brother. "I'm going to have a talk with Mr. Wytson."

In a moment the Tempter had vanished. Before Lance had time to speak Mr. Wytson guessed at what was coming — a portion of it at least. Very rapidly and somewhat con-

fusedly Lance told his thoughts and fears, his temptation — as well as his fault.

“Of course, sir, I know *now* that I’ve got to be punished,” he said, “because I’m telling you all this instead of waiting to tell it to Mr. Meredith — at any rate the larky part. And if you wouldn’t mind telling him for me when he’s disengaged, sir, I should feel that everything was all right. Well, not exactly all right, of course, until I’ve had the punishment, but what I mean is — well, sir, you know what I mean, don’t you?”

“I think I do, Lance. You mean that you are now rid of any further temptation to evade justice, and that you are speaking to me not as a friend but as a master?”

“Of course, sir.”

“Very well. I need not say how sorry I am, Lannie: but I’m afraid punishment is inevitable. I’m not sure that it would be right in me to try and beg you off: considering the circumstances, I really don’t think it would. At the same time, I think I can relieve you of some of your fears. There is not the least necessity for publicity. Both Mr. Meredith and I can keep a secret to ourselves — don’t you think?”

Lance took the master’s hand in both his own. He could not speak.

“Leave it all to me, Lannie. I will see Mr. Meredith and arrange everything for the end of afternoon schools. He will be awfully sorry it is you. As a matter of fact, we both thought we knew the culprit. If Mr. Meredith had

not been called away we should have been going into the case now."

Lance was a little late for dinner, but nobody asked incriminating questions.

Said Harry to Lance as they left the school together at half-past four, "I expected a row this afternoon — didn't you? D'ye think Poker forgot all about that ferret business this morning?"

"Don't think it's likely," said Lance with an attempt at a laugh.

"Well, I'm pretty sure he thought he'd spotted the chap who brought them to school. But he's so shortsighted he never can be sure of a fellow. Says we all look so much alike in these blouses. Never remembers a name."

"What fellow did he spot, do you think?" asked Lance.

"Why young Archie Turton-Brown, of course. Isn't he always bringing some vermin or other into school?"

"Only white mice and that sort of trash."

"Yes, but I could see Poker was looking at Archie suspiciously. I'll bet you he calls him out to-morrow morning."

"We shall see," said Lance.

"Where are your books, Lannie?" asked Harry.

This was the question Lance was waiting for.

"Must have left them on my desk," he said. "Shall have to go back and fetch 'em. Don't you wait."

Harry did not wait. His brothers were already ahead.

Lance was nearly an hour late for tea. Greatly hoping that his mother had already gone to the nursery he looked into the dining-room. She was sitting there — sewing as usual. He could not run away.

“My darling!” she exclaimed, “what is the matter? You look quite — haggard!”

He kissed her in silence and would have turned away, but she caught and held him and took his face between her hands. She saw that he was in great pain.

“It’s all right mammie — *now*,” he said brokenly, but with a brave smile.

She checked her sobs until she had kissed him again and left the room.

Among his letters on the following morning Mr. Meredith found this note:

Dear Sir,— I do hope you won’t think that I brought the ferrets to school on purpose to let them loose. I really did not. The chap who was taking them to our house is an errand-lad, and as he had no parcel for us I did not want him to waste his master’s time, so I took them from him. I only wanted to make Gus Byrse jump a bit, but the ferret wriggled and tried to bite and I dropped him. Then before I could catch him again the row began. I do hope you will believe this because it is the real truth.

I remain, dear Sir,

Yours obediently,

LANCE RIDINGDALE.

Mr. Meredith read the note through three times and then silently handed it to Mr. Wytson.

"He didn't breathe a word of this to me yesterday!" exclaimed Wytson. Both men looked distressed. "You believe him, of course?"

"Believe him!"—Meredith spoke sharply—"I'd take his word before the evidence of my own eyes: though considering my eyesight that's not saying much."

"Why on earth couldn't he have said this to us last night!" said Mr. Wytson with a groan.

"Because he couldn't. 'Tisn't in him. He'd be flayed alive before he excused himself. That's the Ridingdale spirit."

"Wish we had more of it!"

"Don't know how you feel, Wytson: I feel a brute."

"I feel like — asking for a holiday. What's the day of the month?"

"Well, if it's not the 21st it's the 22nd," said Mr. Meredith glancing at a calendar on the mantel-piece: "yes, it's the 22nd."

"Then it's the feast of St. Cecilia!" exclaimed Mr. Wytson jumping up from the breakfast-table. "I'll see Father Horbury this very moment. In a musical school like this we ought to have a holiday on such a day."

"I don't object, and I don't think his Reverence will."

His Reverence did not object.

Nor did the boys object. They assembled at nine o'clock as usual, some of them expecting — well, anything but a

holiday. Mr. Meredith was presiding in the Study-hall and said the prayers just as on an ordinary day. Then he made a speech. It was short and to the point.

"Boys, you will expect me to refer to that serious breach of discipline in which most of you took part yesterday morning. I want to tell you that the — ringleader gave himself up yesterday and was promptly, I may say severely, punished. In fact, he received the heaviest penalty that the rules of this school allow. I am not going to give his name, and if you are the gentlemen I take you all to be, not one of you will ever try to find it out. Indeed, I beg of you as a special favour to myself and to the boy who has — suffered, that you will abstain from asking one another any question whatever relating to this affair. You may think that this is asking too much; but when I tell you that the boy might easily, very easily, have escaped all punishment, you will understand that I do not wish him to suffer further by being pointed at as the boy who was birched. And when I tell you that even when he had declared himself to be the culprit he omitted to mention a most important circumstance, and one which, had I known it, would certainly have mitigated the punishment — might have changed its character altogether — you will I am sure be doubly anxious to spare the feelings of — yes, I must say it, this very honourable and noble lad. Myself, far from thinking the worse of him for what he has suffered, I thank God for sending us such a boy."

Talk of three hearty British cheers — well, the Unknown

got three times thrice repeated. And this though not a single boy in the room knew of the impending holiday.

Lance knew, though. He was not in the Study-hall. While Mr. Meredith was speaking Lance and the senior prefect were blowing up the footballs. Mr. Wytson had caught Lance before nine o'clock, and telling him of the holiday, sent him to the ball-shop.

"I say," remarked the boy-prefect to Lance, "how long are the chaps going to keep up that yelling? They seem to have taken leave of their senses. Have we had a victory of any sort?"

"Shouldn't wonder," smiled Lance.



LANCE IN LONDON

LANCE IN LONDON.

“To London, mother!
And with the Colonel?”

The laugh that had fixed itself on Lance’s face for so many years — always excepting those seasons of sadness which, as a rule, were of the briefest — died completely away. Incredulity was in every line of his countenance.



“Yes, dear, and there’s no time to lose,” said Mrs. Ridingdale, smiling at her son’s astonishment. “The Colonel goes by the 8.10 train to-morrow morning.”

“But — but you are *sure*, mother, he really wants *me*?”

“Quite, Lannie. And the best thing you can do is to pack a little portmanteau at once,” said Mrs. Ridingdale putting down her sewing and taking Lance’s arm. “Let us do it now.”

Grown men have been far less excited at the prospect

of starting for the North Pole than was Lance at the idea of finding himself in London. He had been to Lord Dalesworth's two or three times, and he had once spent a few days at Scarborough; but London was as strange to him as St. Petersburg.

It was a very happy boy that stood on the Ridingle platform the next morning, his tall hat and Eton suit well brushed, and the light shoes he so seldom wore shining like two little mirrors.

The season had barely begun, but the Colonel's sister-in-law and her family had already arrived at their town house, and Lance received from the old lady a warm and motherly welcome.

Lance's wonder and surprise were a constant delight to the Colonel, who had long ago found London all but intolerable, saving for a few days now and then; and he smiled much oftener and more affectionately than he was wont when the boy lifted his rosy, eager, laughing face in gratitude for every fresh pleasure provided for him.

"Ought to have thought of it before," the old man said, as they left the Lyceum after seeing Sir Henry in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and the boy showed that he could hardly contain himself for sheer delight at the performance. "Must bring up a brace of you at a time, now and then. Ought to see a bit of London while you're young. Won't care much for it afterwards."

The next night it was the opera, and Lance dined with the Colonel at his club.

“One of Jack Riddingdale’s lads,” was the title his host gave him as he was introduced to two old warriors who were invited to join them. “Awful young rip — as you can see.” And then *sotto voce* — “Finest young beggar you ever met. Nobody like him — except his brothers.”

So the old soldiers made much of him and told him such stories of brave deeds and fierce fighting that, if the Colonel had not interposed, the boy, sitting panting and breathless, and only half-conscious of the dainties on his plate, would have had no dinner.

The opera was *La Sonnambula*, and at the end of it the Colonel decided within himself that one performance of this sort would be quite enough for Lance, at any rate during the present visit. For the boy had spent nearly the whole time in such a condition of half-suppressed excitement, alternating with sobs he could scarcely suppress, that a lady in the stall next to him became filled with motherly alarm, and plied him (to his lasting shame) with a smelling-bottle and much eau-de-Cologne, as well as endearing words.

“I’m so sorry,” he said when the opera was over and they got into the cab — for he was not at all sure how the Colonel would view this demonstration — “but I really could not help it. And I did try so hard.”

But to his relief his host only replied:

“All right, old boy. Opera’s a bit too much for you. To-morrow we’ll have a good laugh to make up for it.”

They had several good laughs, as a matter of fact; for after seeing the conjuring and the mysteries, as well as the

funny men, at the Egyptian Hall, they assisted in the evening at the Savoy, where Lance easily led the laughter at a performance of *The Mikado*.

It was a golden week, and when Lance got back home on Saturday afternoon, he entertained the family for hours with a detailed account of his doings and the sights he had seen in London.

"I only wanted *you* there, mammie," he said to his mother as soon as they were alone. "I did miss you so much."

"And don't you think I missed you, darling?"

"Did you *really*, mother dear, and — and with all the others at home?"

"Ever so much, Lannie."

He was silent for a time — "thinking hard," as he would have said. Suddenly he knelt in his favourite attitude at his mother's knee and lifted his face to hers.

"But, mammie dear, some day — some day ——" He could not go on: something hindered speech.

"Some day?" she began very gently as she stroked his hair with her two hands, "some day, my darling, I must part with all of you — was that what you were going to say, Lannie?"

"Ye-es, mother."

"It is partly because of that — that when one of my darlings is away, I miss him so much now. Do you understand, dear?"

"I think so, mother. But — but ——"

He could not bring it out — that secret of his, and yet he did want so much to utter it now. For like many another healthy-minded lad with a capacity for enjoyment that is worth an empire, and a simple piety that is worth infinitely more, his week of pleasure, intensely delightful while it lasted, was now causing a reaction that drove him back first to his mother's arms — the only earthly Paradise that exists — and through that easy route to the Heart of God Himself.

Lance took his mother's hands and hid his face in them, and she felt his hot tears trickling upon her palms.

"What is it, darling?" she asked soothingly. "I don't think you are in trouble, Lannie, are you? Nothing has gone wrong, I'm sure, for I have just received such a charming little note from the Colonel about you."

Lance lifted his tear-stained face rather quickly.

"Have you really, mother? What does he say?"

Mrs. Ridingdale took the letter from her pocket and read it aloud.

"Afraid I can't come up to-night: rather too late. But I wanted to tell you, what you already know, that Lance is a perfect little gentleman, and has acted as such throughout. Better look after him carefully. My sister-in-law declares she will kidnap him at the first opportunity."

Lance's face was radiant, and "It's awfully good of him," he said.

"Very thoughtful of him," Mrs. Ridingdale admitted, "though of course I could trust my boy to behave well under any circumstances — couldn't I, dear?"

“ Yes, mammie,” said Lance, returning her kiss, and then lapsing again into silence.

“ But it’s so rummy, mother, I can’t understand it,” he broke out suddenly. “ You see, I thought — I mean I was afraid that I was a bit of a scamp; though, of course,” he added eagerly, “ I didn’t mean to be and — and, I won’t.”

She knew something was coming and drew him closer towards her.

“ Only the other day when we dined at his club, the Colonel told those two old gentlemen I was ‘ a regular rip ; ’ but you know, mother, he didn’t really seem to mean it, and now he writes you that note. Then there’s Father Horbury ” — Lance hesitated a little here — “ he — he — well, of course, mammie, he knows me through and through, and has known me ever since I was a tiny brat; and the other day when I — when I asked him — Oh, mother darling ! ” the boy wailed, “ I didn’t think it would be so hard to tell you.”

It was not necessary, for, as she threw her arms about him, she told him all that was in his mind.

“ You know, my love, that I have the same affection for you all,” she said; “ but my Lannie has had a harder struggle than some of the others, and his failures have caused him suffering of various sorts. But the point is, my darling, you have *never* given up trying, and so there has always been a certain understanding between us, and a love that is in some degree peculiar. Of course, I am only guessing; but am I not right in supposing that you have been asking Father

Horbury a very important question and that it concerns your vocation? And did not my saying how much I missed you make you think of that 'some day' when I shall be asked to give you up to God — for ever?"

It was so like her, Lance thought, to anticipate him in that way. There never had been a time in his life when she could not read his thoughts, once he had given her the smallest clue to them.

"Of course, mother, I should have told you long ago, only I was afraid of myself, and I thought what an awful thing it would be if I failed after speaking to you about it. Because I knew it would make you happy to think I wanted to be a religious, even though, when the time came, you felt the pull of it awfully."

"God gives a special grace to mothers at such times, my darling, and next to the favoured souls themselves, the happiest people in the world are the near and dear ones of a religious."

"It is nice to hear you say that, mother. Father Horbury said something very like it. Fact, he said a lot of things that astonished me. I quite expected he would ask me what I meant by talking about entering religion, and instead of that he said — 'Bravo! you're just the fellow. Thank God!'"

Lance could laugh now at the reminiscence, and his mother laughed too, as he added:

"And you see, mammie, he really *does* know me — down to the ground!"

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